Chapter One
Convenient Farewells

‘Ok bye!’ Waltz waved back at the cat as the rest of the guild walked away. ‘We won’t miss you at all!’

They headed down a pleasant country road, with a golden wheat field on one side and a plain dirt field that had already been cultivated on the other. Waltz, Sumaey, Graham and Spirit walked away together, leaving behind the freaky looking cat. Loxus, the mechanical spider-scorpion thing, walked ahead of them, his metallic feet clinking as he walked slowly forwards.

Spirit and Graham didn’t care much for the cat, and hardly noticed it whether it was there or not.

Waltz dared to glance back at the cat, feeling a chill down its spine when he noticed that it was still watching him. He had dumped the cat in a random location as soon as he decided he didn’t want it around anymore. He needed six members to form a guild, and had grabbed the cat from a stranger to get registered as an official guild. But once the paperwork was complete, he couldn’t find the man he intended to return the cat to. Holding onto it for a few days in case he found the man again, he eventually decided to leave it in the wilderness.

‘Uhg’ Waltz grimaced, turning away from the cat and looking ahead again. ‘Creepy. I hate the way it never blinks.’

‘Hm’ Sumaey replied. ‘Aren’t we one member in our guild short now? I thought a guild needed at least six members.

‘To become a registered guild’ Waltz agreed. ‘It does. But once you're registered, things become a lot more flexible.’

Waltz dared to glance back again, but this time the cat creature was gone.

He breathed a sigh of relief, facing ahead again.

‘…I hate cats.’

‘So what's our first mission as a newly registered guild?’ Sumaey asked him curtly, getting straight to the point.

‘Our first mission’ Waltz began dramatically, ‘is to go to the local tavern and search for a quest that is suitable to our level of skill’ he said, ‘…and we can get a drink while we’re there’ he added hastily with a self-satisfied grin.

‘Why don’t we find a place to live first?’ Sumaey suggested.

‘Live?’ Waltz scoffed as they walked along the dry dirt road, the ever-silent Spirit and Graham and Loxus walking a little ahead. ‘I've never really lived anywhere.’

‘Not even when you were young?’

‘That’s an exception.’

‘Well shouldn’t we have a headquarters of some kind?’ Sumaey suggested.

‘Hm?’ Waltz said. ‘Hey I've just had a great idea! We should find somewhere to live and make it our headquarters!’

‘Indeed’ Sumaey droned. ‘Convenient then, that I already found a place.’

‘You did?’ Waltz was totally surprised. ‘Waw really?’

‘Yup’ Sumaey nodded. ‘We’re going there now…that is unless…you would rather get drunk at the local tavern.’
‘As tempting as that sounds’ Waltz spoke slowly, ‘let’s go visit our new home! I want to see where we will live.’

Luckily it was pretty close to where they happened to be at that time, and the journey was pleasant.
Waltz stood in the sparsely growing forest with his new and awesome guild, the small woodland was set on the open plains and away from any main route or road. This little cottage they had found before them was cosy and peaceful, with its little windows, thatched roof and winding cobbled stone path (surrounded by overflowing flower beds) that led to a red painted front door, with a little window shaped like a heart set in the wood at head-height.
‘It’s beautiful’ Waltz sighed in awe, ‘very homely. How on earth did you manage to afford this?’
‘Don’t be stupid’ Sumaey scowled. ‘It’s only a rented apartment. There are four different living quarters. We have the one of the ones on the top floor.’
‘Oh’ Waltz said scratching his head. ‘Of course.’
‘It was originally a cottage owned by a single person’ Sumaey said, leaning on a hip and folding her arms. ‘But now it’s been converted so that the person who owns the building can make more money.’
‘Hey actually that’s a good idea’ Waltz thought aloud. ‘Maybe we should do something like that.’
‘Sure’ Sumaey scoffed. ‘When we have that sort of money to buy that sort of building in the first place. I got this cheap at short notice. That’s why I didn’t mention it before. Also I forgot.’
‘Hu?’ Waltz cocked his head, scratching his chin as he continued to observe the building. ‘How lovely.’
And then Spirit who stood behind them, spoke.
‘I think it is wonderful.’
Sumaey and Waltz both glanced back at him.
They smiled.
‘Come on’ Sumaey said. ‘Let’s go inside.’

Their room was one of the ones upstairs (as Sumaey has already mentioned). They were able to enter it by way of a wooden stairs (at the back of the cottage) that led up to a pretty balcony made of dark wood which ran along the length of the building. One door was the door to their apartment, the other, was the other (obviously).
‘So who’s our neighbour?’ Waltz asked, eyeing up the other door.
‘It’s empty at the moment’ Sumaey told Waltz as Spirit opened the door to their apartment and walked in. ‘There’s two magicians living downstairs’ Sumaey continued, ‘but they're hardly ever here, and apart from that, we have this place to ourselves.’ She walked towards the door to their apartment, following Loxus into the room. ‘There was a young woman living in the other apartment’ Sumaey went on. ‘But she’s moved out.’

Graham who had struggled up the steep stairs to follow them, tried to enter the apartment then.
'No!' Sumaey said pushing him back. 'Horses and other living transport is not allowed!'
Graham's response to this was to bellow at her.
'*Shut up'* Sumaey hissed at him as she fought him in the doorway, struggling to push him back as he held his ground. 'You'll annoy the neighbours. We don't want to get kicked out of here. Do you know how hard this place was to find?'
'You said it was easy' Waltz interjected as he watched them struggle without bothering to help.
'I got lucky' Sumaey hissed back.
'And I thought you said we had no neighbours…' Waltz grumbled, scratching at his ear. '*The two magicians downstairs are hardly ever here* you said.'
'Start as you mean to go on' Sumaey retorted, before turning her attention back to Graham. 'I said *no*. You'll stay in the stables with the other horses.'
He bellowed at her again. Graham had held a grudge against Sumaey since that time she set the end of his tail on fire in the previous book. He had never quite gotten over it.
'Oh, let him stay' Waltz asked nicely. 'He won't cause any trouble I'm sure.' He spoke to Graham now. 'Do you agree to be quiet if we let you in?'
Graham did not answer, as he was unable to speak, being a deer and all. But he was silent, and so Waltz took that as agreement.
'Come on then' Waltz sang, patting Graham on the back. 'Let's go look at our new home.'
Sumaey sighed wearily, relaxing as she let go of his horns and straightening up.
'Alright' she said turning away from the pair. 'But Graham better be on his best behaviour indoors.'
'Oh he will' Waltz said leaning into him. 'You're a good boy' he cooed, 'aren't you?'
Graham did not react, but stood silently staring into the room.
'Well' Waltz said stepping back and indicating the open doorway. 'After you.'
Graham dipped his head, making his way forwards and into the apartment. Waltz followed after him, closing the door after.

Inside it was small, but it was pleasant. There were just two rooms, three if you counted the small bathroom. The first room they entered was the largest; there was nothing but a double bunk bed in the corner beside the window, and a decorative rug in the middle, and nothing more. In the next room there was a kitchen. And that was it.
'I like it' Sumaey said, leaning on a hip and folding her arms. 'It's simple. That in itself has a certain quality about it, don't you think?' she asked turning to Waltz.
Waltz's attention drifted then to the bunk bed.
He grinned.
'One for you one for me?' he said to Sumaey.
'No' Spirit spoke up harshly. 'I share the bunk with her.'
'He's grown no less protective of you then' Waltz mumbled turning away.
Spirit was very attached to Sumaey, and deeply resented Waltz, despite being the leader of his guild. Spirit did not care for him, and he made this very clear. Waltz had no authority over

Spirit, the one time he did try to tell him to do something, Spirit just looked at Waltz as if he had just eaten his own feet.
'I guess I will sleep in this corner then' Waltz lamented, drifting over to that corner and staring down at it sadly. It was a nice patch in the sunlight.
It was then at that moment that Graham came over and sat in that corner, in an action that clearly said '*mine'*.
'Oh come on!' Waltz protested loudly, throwing his arms out. 'What the hell?!! That's my corner!'
Graham roared at him stubbornly, snuggling tighter into the corner protectively.
'No!' Waltz said. 'Out!'
Graham roared again, this time a little louder.
Waltz grabbed him by his long tail, pulling him back. The two began to fight.
'Soft sheets' Sumaey spoke to herself moving over to the bed. 'Do you want the top or bottom bunk?' she asked Spirit.
'You choose' the water elemental said to her.
'I'll take the bottom bunk' she said turning back. 'You can have the top one.'
Spirit nodded to her. He moved forwards and climbed onto the top bunk, as Sumaey moved over to the bottom bunk, lying back on it.
'Will you two shut up!? She snapped at Waltz and Graham who fought in the corner. 'Jeez, I can't hear myself think!'
Waltz glanced up then, Graham using this moment of distraction to kick him hard in the gut, pushing him into the middle of the room.
Waltz groaned in pain, body hunched over and holding himself as he glared at Graham.
'It's ok' Waltz mumbled, turning to the only other available corner in the room, a drafty patch near the door. 'I could still have….' He broke off, seeing Loxus had already claimed that space, curled up with his metallic tail around his spider-body.

That night, he slept in an inconvenient corner of the kitchen on a sleeping mat, right in everybody's way who needed to get there. Despite this, it was very comfortable in their little rented room, and pleasantly warm on that night.
All of them slept peacefully, until they were abruptly woken the next morning by Waltz.
He turned over breathing deeply and stretching as he did so. Waltz heard the garden birds singing outside, felt and morning sun upon his face.
He opened his eyes, and let out a cry of terror.
Sumaey who had been sleeping on the edge of her bed panicked, falling off the edge. The others in the room had woken instantly, Spirit from the top bunk was glaring disapprovingly at Waltz, and Graham and Loxus were peering around the door to look into the kitchen.
Waltz was pressed against the wall of the kitchen, on the other side of the room to where he had been sleeping, clutching his racing heart as he stared in horror at the thing that had woke him up. He had been resting peacefully on his back until he had opened his eyes, and saw the thing leaning over him.
The cat.
'…what the hell are you doing here…?' Waltz gasped, staring at the strange-looking cat, the one they had dumped at the start of the book.

It had large ears and large eyes, a tail that was split in two and naked skin that looked like dead flesh.
'I hate cats…' Waltz uttered. 'They're so freaky…'
Sumaey had picked herself up off the floor, staring into the kitchen.
'Hey look it found us' she said.
'I hate it!' Waltz squawked. 'Why won't it blink?! It's horrid.'
'Oh, it's not that bad' Sumaey smiled, wandering over to it and bending down to pick it up. 'I rather like it' she said, holding it in her arms.
The cat-creature turned its head, staring up at her.
'See?' Sumaey said turning to Waltz. 'It's friendly…and it's soft…'
'We're not keeping it' Waltz spat.
'Why not?' Sumaey glowered. 'Isn't it officially a member of our guild?'
'No! I'm willing to keep that stubborn mule here' he said pointing an accusing finger at Graham, 'but I'm not having *that* thing.'
Graham instantly turned and roared at him.
'Shut up!' Waltz retorted.
'I think you're over-reacting' Sumaey told him flatly.
'Here' Waltz said rising swiftly and darting over to the window and opening it. 'Let me solve this problem.'
He swiped the cat from Sumaey's arms and tossed it out of the window. The cat landed safely on the soft grassy floor, turning back and staring up at Waltz.
'Don't come back here!' Waltz yelled at it, before snapping the window shut hastily afterwards.
(PLEASE DON'T ACTUALLY THROW CATS FROM WINDOWS. THEY DON'T LIKE IT)
'There' Waltz said happily, moving over to the sink and washing his hands. 'A job well done. Now let's go get some breakfast.'
Sumaey sighed wearily at him, shaking her head.
There was a communal kitchen downstairs; it was small, but pleasant.
Sumaey was only just about able to cook the food as fast as Waltz was eating it. After a time she stopped, glaring at him.
'Have you noticed that every anime has a food manic?' she asked him. 'Hey! Are you listening?'
He glanced up at her.
Sumaey raised her hand, pointing at him. 'You're eating so fast…you have shrapnel on your face.'
Waltz paused then, reaching for a napkin and wiping his face in a very delicate manner, like a gentleman, very unlike the slob who had been eating with his face pressed against his plate.
He didn't even notice the cat who appeared then, the strange one with large eyes that had been following them. It leapt lightly onto the corner of the table, having snuck in through the open door. It moved as silent as…well…a cat…or an owl at night.
'You had better eat something yourself' Waltz told Sumaey. 'We're leaving as soon as possible.'
Graham plodded up beside him, eyeing up his cereal.

He stuck his face into the bowl, beginning to eat.
Waltz began to loudly protest, fighting Graham out of his food indignantly. Beside them Spirit groaned wearily, resting his chin in his hands and glancing away. He had only eaten a little corner of toast and was apparently satisfied with that.
‘To be honest I'm anxious to begin another quest’ she said to him. ‘I feel restless just sitting around. I don’t feel hungry to eat.’
Waltz paused then, releasing his grip on his breakfast bowl which Graham stole, hastily finishing the rest of the cereal.
‘You are looking for adventure?’ Waltz asked her.
‘I want to find out who I really am’ Sumaey told him, ‘none of my memory has come back. all that I do remember is…waking up in the wilderness…with you by my side…nothing more.’
‘Sounds like a pretty good memory’ Waltz gleamed at her, leaning forwards on the table with a sly grin. ‘What more do you want in life?’
‘Don’t flatter yourself’ she told him shortly, glancing to the cat that sat on the table right beside him and out of his line of sight at that time.
‘Hm?’ Waltz said noticing her gaze sailing past him.
He turned to see the cat there, frozen to the spot.
‘It’s you…’ he hissed angrily at it.

They left shortly after that, Waltz and Sumaey packed their bags quickly, and just before they left the property, Waltz picked up the cat and lobbed it into a passing wagon.
The man driving the wagon, pulled by a pony, did not notice.
‘Ha!’ Waltz cried triumphantly as the cat righted itself, having landed softly in the pile of hay that filled the cart. ‘You can’t follow us anymore now can you?!’
The strange cat just sat there in the hay watching them, never moving, never blinking, only staring.
The man that drove the cart was an elderly man, he didn’t seem to hear Waltz’s calls.
‘Come on’ Sumaey told him impatiently. ‘We should get going.’
Waltz lingered for a moment longer, until he saw the cart disappear over the lip of the hill, as it travelled down gentle slope of the road on the other side.
He let out a sigh of relief, turning and skipping towards Sumaey with his arms out. He didn’t run in a straight line, instead weaved back and forth happily.
Sumaey only scowled at him, turning sharply away and following after Spirit who waited for her beside Graham who carried all the bags. Loxus began to wag his tail in that same way he did when he was excited. (It was kind of awkward with the lantern hanging on the end) They had known him for only a short while, but were becoming familiar with his traits. He was a happy creature, and understood every word they spoke. Or so it seemed.
Waltz hurried to catch up with the others as they made their way onwards.
‘And so…’ he sighed happily stretching his arms up and reaching for the heavens, ‘…our adventure begins…’

Chapter Two
Daytime Stars

Thankfully the journey to the next town was not a long one, it would only be a few hours walk, but it wasn't long before Waltz grew bored. He decided he should began to entertain himself.
He broke into song…

Kalla blickar, kalla kerar
Och du var bara 14 verar
Ta min hand och visa mig vдgen
Jag дare din I alla lдgen

Hej Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika
Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika
Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika
Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika

He leant into Sumaey as he continued to sing…
(his voice was actually not too bad)

Kдnns som veare kдrlek kom pe sne fren bцrjan
Precis som lutande tornet I Pisa
Tornet steare dдare дn idag
Och hдare steare du och hдare steare jag

Hej Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika
Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika
Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika

Hej Monika
Hej pe dig Monika

Then he danced away, doing in cartwheel and skipping over towards Spirit.
‘Don’t touch me’ Spirit hissed as Waltz drew closer.
Waltz froze then, locked eye to eye with Spirit
Waltz smiled then, trying to break the tension as Spirit continued to glare. It was obvious the water elemental still hated him. (quite a bit)
‘Hey look!’ Waltz declared loudly, suddenly turning away as they continue to walk, pointing down the road as they went. ‘We’re here!’
Sumaey paused in her footsteps, glancing up at building before them. It was a welcoming sight.
All around the inn the vegetation was lush and thick, the leaves in the trees were bright, and the many paths that led to the inn were winding. Upon the rooftop the moss grew thickly, and through the cathedral-like windows even in midday, there came a warm glow from inside.
‘It’s glorious isn’t it?’ Waltz said proudly, standing there with his hands upon his hips in the middle of the road as he took in the sight. ‘You know one day I would love to retire and own my own inn. See the folks come and go, learn their stories…’
Sumaey moved towards him, stopping by his side.
‘Would you really?’ she asked him sceptically.
‘Well yeah’ he said turning to face her.
‘I love being an adventurer and owning my own guild,’ his expression turned into a frown then, ‘even if they don’t respect me’ he added in a glower.
Sumaey only gave him a level expression.
‘I don’t plan on dying’ Waltz said to her, ‘I know it’s dangerous what we do, and that I *might* die someday, but…’ he trailed off then. ‘I can’t fight until I'm old and grey…and so I will retire, and own my own inn, where I will pass on the valuable information I have gathered over the years to young and worthy adventurers.’ He nodded happily to himself at the thought, smiling. ‘That is what I will do.’
‘I can’t imagine you old and grey’ Sumaey said.
‘What do you mean?’ Waltz said.
‘Well…’ Sumaey mumbled, ‘your hair…it will be pink forever now won’t it? So you’ll never turn grey.’
‘Haha’ Waltz grinned, scratching the back of his head. ‘You're right there.’
What had happened here with his hair was this: Waltz somehow managed to make a fairy named Candy Cake angry due to some accidental misunderstanding (she had thought he was cheating on her because she found him lying asleep on the floor only half dressed with a bunch of other women who were also half dressed, but what had actually happened was that he was having a drunken game of twister with a bunch of strangers, and they had taken some of their clothes off for reasons that Waltz had since forgotten – it was probably because they were hot - and the next morning Candy Cake had inconveniently found him in that state. She

had reached the obvious conclusion, and in a moment of anger had cursed him with a spell, turning his hair permanently pink)
Waltz flicked his hair back, beaming at Sumaey.
‘At first it was a bit of a shock’ he admitted, referring to his hair and the state of its new colour of pink-ness. ‘But now I rather like it.’
‘It looks wonderful’ Sumaey droned.
‘Come on’ Waltz said facing ahead again and marching towards the inn, ‘let’s go get a drink and find a job. Our very first’ he gushed.
Sumaey sighed wearily as she watched Waltz soldier on before them, Spirit the water elemental stood by her side, the two exchanged a glance.
They walked together after Waltz towards the inn, followed by Graham the white deer-like creature, and the strange spider-lantern called Loxus.
Waltz was already through the door by the time Sumaey and the others reached the inn through the small gate at the front.
‘Maybe you should wait outside’ Sumaey spoke quietly to Spirit, ‘and you’ she said to Graham and Loxus.
‘I think perhaps you are right’ Spirit grumbled back. ‘I don’t trust these people’ he said glancing through one of the windows on the ground floor.
Spirit remained where he was as Sumaey went on ahead. She stepped through the door of the inn, immediately greeted by noise and cheers from the other guests all having a good time. Even in the middle of the day they were drinking and falling about. In the corner there seemed to be a minor fight going on, someone smashed a bottle over someone else’s head, before slipping on the contents of the bottle he had spilt and falling over with the man he had hit. The man behind the bar acted as if he didn’t notice, instead containing to clean the glasses and serve more drinks.
Sumaey rolled her eyes, turning away as she spotted Waltz standing on the other side of the room before the billboard. He was fixated on it, attention roving the notices before him.
Sumaey stepped forwards, making her way towards him.
‘Anything interesting?’ she asked when she reached his side.
‘Hmm’ Waltz mused, narrowing his eyes as he looked at the ads.

Mouse racing

Catch your mouse

Paint your mouse

Race your mouse and win first prize!

RATS NOT ALLOWED

Turtle on the run

Last seen in my garden
Has a shell (hard) four fat feet, a stubby little tail and a small head
If you see it **DO NOT APPROACH** as it may be in a bad mood and bite your finger
You have been warned!
Simply inform the owner if sighted, and I will come out as fast as possible with my lasso so that it does not get away again
Answers to the name Norman (sometimes – if this doesn't work, try hitting it with a cabbage)

MASSIVE REWARD

For capture of strange masked figure

Figure is always dressed all in black, with black gloves and a raised hood (black)
Wears a crows mask with a long beak and large eyes

100,000 BILLION REWARD FOR CAPTURE AND SAFE DELIVERY

Scare the weight off you

Are you fat and hideous and hate the sight of yourself in the mirror?
Do you want to murder that skinny blonde down the road? Or that handsome slender man with a charming smile? Don't you just want to tie them both down and force feed them cake until they are indistinguishable from walruses?

While we're not allowed to make other people fat (though we would if we could and we'd charge them for it) we can make **you** slimmer!
In no time at all we will transform you from a beached whale struggling to get back to the sea, to an underweight, anorexic stick insect struggling to survive.
Lose a stone a day with our fabulous (strict) diet regime!
(Once you agree, there's no going back)
Scare the fat away by being locked in a mental asylum for nights on end, run for your life at every possible corner from ghosts and zombies and deranged serial killers. Don't want to keep your food down? Don't worry! Vomit everything you eat (what little you can find) through pure and primal fear! Dramatically increase your heart rate by hiding from enemies, and the pounds will just melt away!

You've never run so fast in your life!

Minor side-effects: heart attack and death (no compensation offered)
(And please don't actually tie your neighbours down and force feed them like geese ready to be made into pâté – you can't sue us for that either)

Do you have a headache or an ear ache?
Just remove it by sawing off whichever part of your body hurts!
X-butcher turned surgeon
No job too small!

Did you just fart?
Over-react by yelling at your husband
Marriage Counsellor

‘Look’ Waltz said, spotting an ad at the very bottom of the board and right in the corner. He snatched it up, holding it close to his face as he read it eagerly. ‘This looks interesting.’
Sumaey glanced at the page from over his shoulder.

Horrifyingly Terrible Monster out on the Prowl!!!

Huge reward for the elimination of a terrible beast that has been causing habitat destruction, crashing our parties by setting the guests on fire, eating our livestock, burning our crops, scaring out pet cats and dogs and generally being a nuisance

A scary bird-like creature that uses its wings to help it walk, has brilliant red feathers that you could not help but admire (if you get close enough to be killed by it) and also breathes fire.
Is the size of a really big horse – like a shire horse

If you can kill this beast and save our lives….we will make it worth your while

(also if you can find our village’s lost kitten, you will make a young girl very happy – black and white kitten with a dot on its head)

This looks like it was posted just for us Waltz noted, reading it over again.
‘So you’re going to take this job?’ Sumaey said raising an eyebrow.

‘I sure am’ Waltz winked at her, folding the piece of paper and slipping it into his pocket. ‘I am a master at this after all.’
‘A master idiot’ Sumaey mumbled.
Waltz turned very slowly towards her with a flat expression, completely not amused.
‘You look like a fish’ Sumaey informed him.
‘Shut up’ Waltz grumbled.
Behind them, one of the men sitting at a table, hood raised with his face hidden, turned to face them.
‘Anyway’ Sumaey spoke loudly. ‘We should get going, we’ve hardly any money left. You spent the last of it on that ridiculous hat.’
‘But I like this hat’ Waltz told her defensively, taking it out of his jacket and hugging it. ‘No one’s going to take it away from me…’
Sumaey sneered down at it. It was a hat made entirely of fruit, the centre piece being a pineapple.
‘What a waste of money’ Sumaey hissed.
Waltz glared at her, turning away and clutching the over-sized hat to his chest. He began to talk to it, whispering in a comforting way.
‘Don’t listen to her’ he cooed to the hat. ‘She doesn’t know what she’s saying.’
‘The others are waiting outside’ Sumaey said to him, turning and walking away. ‘We’ve no reason to stay here now we’ve got a job.’
‘Right’ Waltz mumbled after her, still hugging his hat. ‘I'm right behind you.’

The next morning

They were still at the inn, having not actually left yet.
Sumaey was wandering the grounds around the inn, glaring about her as she searched for Waltz.
‘Where is he that little worm?’ she glowered to herself.
She finally found him sometime later around the stables when a painter pointed her in the direction of ‘the pink haired man who was acting peculiar’. Sumaey took the piece of paper the man handed her, before moving away and heading towards Waltz who stood hanging off a lamppost, a piece of dark metal designed in a gothic style.
Sumaey slowed to a stop beside the post, staring up at Waltz who still held onto the lamppost with one hand, his other arm hanging limply by his side as he stared vacantly upwards.
‘Waltz…’ Sumaey began, putting her hands on her hips as she surveyed him. ‘What are you doing?’
It was a few moments before Waltz finally answered her.
‘I’m…’ he began, ‘…looking at the stars.’
Sumaey glanced up to the sky above.
‘But its daytime’ she informed him. ‘There are no stars.’
Waltz faltered then, as if he were genuinely surprised by this.
‘Then what is that I see…?’ he asked.

Spirit came up behind Sumaey then, handing her a bag of powder.
‘Is this what he gave you?’ Sumaey asked Waltz, taking the bag from Spirit and sniffing it.
She hunched over suddenly, hand going to her mouth and nose and coughing violently.
‘What is this stuff?!’
Waltz turned back to them, his expression as if he had only just noticed them for the first time.
‘Liquid sunshine’ Waltz breathed. ‘That’s what it is…’
‘It’s a powder’ Spirit grumbled angrily at him.
‘What?’
‘Have you looked in a mirror lately?’ Sumaey asked him, throwing the bag full of powder away and glaring at him. ‘Your pupils are huge.’
‘….oh….’
‘You took this random substance from that stranger didn’t you?’ Sumaey asked him.
Spirit left her side then.
‘Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to talk to strangers?’ Sumaey interrogated, Waltz was still firmly glued to the lamppost he clung to.
‘I'm not a child’ Waltz replied moodily.
Spirit returned to Sumaey’s side carrying an object.
‘Hey what's in the bucket?’ Waltz asked with sudden interest.
Spirit raised his head, stepping back before throwing the entire contents of the bucket over Waltz.
The shock of the ice-cold water was a shock to Waltz, and in his state of shock, he fell from the post and onto the floor in a shocking manner.
‘AAAAHHH! WHAT THE HELL??!’
‘Get up you lazy bum’ Sumaey ordered him, ‘I'm sick of this ****. We’re supposed to be on this quest. We’ve used the last of our money since you wasted most of it on that stupid hat.’
‘What happened to it?’ Waltz asked, rubbing his eyes.
‘You ate it.’
‘…oh.’
‘Now get up!’ Sumaey barked kicking his boot. ‘We should have left ages ago!’
‘Alright alright I'm getting up’ Waltz argued back, rising gingerly to his feet.
Waltz hunched over, hand going to his head. He then noticed the piece of paper Sumaey carried.
‘What's that?’
‘It’s a picture of you last night’ Sumaey said lifting it to show him. ‘You were hanging off that lamppost for so long that artist managed to paint a picture of you.’
‘Aww whoa’ Waltz said taking it. ‘It’s night time in the picture.’
‘Yeah’ Sumaey spoke moodily. ‘You were there for *ages*…apparently.’
‘Hu’ Waltz said.
‘Hu indeed’ Sumaey echoed with annoyance. ‘Now let’s get going, the others are waiting for us.’
As Waltz rolled up the painting, slipping it into the inner pocket of his jacket, he saw Graham and Loxus waiting for him a short distance away.

Waltz was suddenly enveloped by a wild excitement, he grasped the air with a fist, a crazed look in his eyes.
‘Let the adventure begin!’ he declared proudly.
Sumaey only tutted, turning away and rolling her eyes as she made her way towards the others, Spirit following silently after her.
‘So which road are we going to take?’ Sumaey called out to him, without pausing in her step.
‘Hold on!’ Waltz mumbled as he hurried after the others. ‘Let me think about this.’
‘Hello there my friend!’ a man called out to them. ‘I hear you are off on an adventure.’
Sumaey folded her arms, instantly regarding the strange man with mistrust, beside him it was clear that Spirit felt the same way towards him. But not Waltz, Waltz trusted anybody pretty much, as long as they were not a witch.
‘Yes you're absolutely right!’ Waltz said enthusiastically, bounding up to him. ‘We are going on an awesome new adventure and were just starting on our merry way!’
‘Well have I got just the thing for you!’ the man in the colourful clothes replied, sitting in his small cart. ‘A map!’ He said producing it, ‘I have several. They will help get you wherever you need to go!’
‘Waw’ Waltz beamed excitedly, ‘this is exactly what we needed! I will take them all!’
‘A wise choice my friend’ the stranger winked handing several rolls over to him, ‘all free of charge.’
‘Now if that’s not a good deal’ Waltz grinned back at Sumaey, ‘I don’t know what is…’

Chapter Three
Elusive Presence

A few days later, and they were slap-bang in the middle of a very hostile swamp.
‘You're a bloody idiot you know that?!’ Sumaey was howling at Waltz. ‘This is all your fault.’
‘I don’t know what you mean’ Waltz cried defensively back, ‘I followed the map exactly.’
‘That’s the problem’ Sumaey protested.
Waltz gritted his teeth, fighting through the hanging vines, Graham nearby was wading through the mud, his slender legs sinking into the muck and his white coat filthy. Loxus was struggling the most, his spindly spider-legs were all but consumed by the mud, and the creature was only just about able to keep up with the others and keep above the surface. Only Spirit seemed to be doing fine, he was a water element, and although he didn’t live in bogs, his kind had always thrived where it was damp.
‘We have to get out of here soon’ Sumaey huffed, pushing back the foliage around her. ‘We only seem to be getting farther in. Maybe we should turn around.’
Spirit glanced behind them, suddenly tense. Clearly, he sensed something the others did not.
‘We can’t turn back now’ Waltz was saying. ‘We’re over halfway through the swamp; to turn back now would only take longer.’

‘So says your map’ Sumaey snapped back at him angrily. ‘How do you know we’re not going to die?’
‘Oh give me a break’ Waltz huffed turning away with a grimace.
At that moment Graham roared in displeasure.
‘Shut up!’ Waltz snapped at him.
‘Listen’ Spirit hissed suddenly.
The others instantly froze. They would listen to Spirit’s order, for he talked so little, he only talked when he had something to say, when it was important, and his tone was watchful.
‘What is it Spirit?’ Waltz whispered nervously to him. ‘Do you sense something?’
Spirit only turned back to Waltz, placing a finger silently to his lips.
Waltz swallowed the lump in his throat nervously.
And then the water/mud around them began to move.
‘Oh balls’ Waltz managed to utter, before all hell broke loose.
Several tentacles shot up from the muddy waters at once, bizarre and grotesque they were as they writhed around in all directions, whipping through the air. Graham instantly ran away as fast as he could as Waltz was struck in the gut by one of the tentacles that barrelled into him, doubling him over. Before Waltz had time to think or act the appendage wrapped around him, hauling him into the air.
‘HAAAAAAAAAALP!’
On the ground the others barely noticed him, they were fighting their own battles now. Loxus had quickly been subdued, struggling to move in the thick mud the mechanical contraption that he was, was an easy target. His tail waved helplessly back and forth as his legs moved feverishly through the mud, splashing everywhere, while nearby Spirit and Sumaey fought together.
Up in the air Waltz called forth his magic, placing his hands over the tentacles that wrapped around his chest, and growing tighter as the monster squeezed the breath from him. He used his magic to burn them.
The tentacles instantly dropped him, a high-pitched scream emanated all around as Waltz fell back down to earth, pushing himself up hastily with a deep gasp.
Seeing this Sumaey hesitated, her attention lingering on Waltz a little too long.
‘Sumaey!’
She whipped around as a tentacle shot towards her, deflected by Spirit who leapt to her help, putting himself between Sumaey and the threat.
Instantly exploiting his weakness, several more of the tentacles wrapped around Spirits entire body, winding around his throat.
Spirit completely immobilised and helpless now could do nothing but watch the branches of the trees above as his head was forced back, fighting for air, fighting to free himself.
‘*Spirit*!’ Sumaey screamed in panic.
She hacked and fought against the binds that held the water elemental, as beside her, Waltz rushed to do the same. Even Graham who had returned to them ran to help now, fighting against the heavy binds with his sharpened antlers, even as the tentacles wound around his body.
Nearby, Loxus was not moving, his body half-buried in the mud and tail limp and still now.

‘He’ll die!’ Sumaey screamed, fighting desperately against the creatures hold to try to free Spirit, even now as the other appendages whipped around them as if in a high wind.
Waltz froze then, bare hands upon the tentacles that held Spirit, staring away suddenly.
‘What is that…?’
A light grew suddenly, enveloping everything.
Waltz felt his feet leave the ground, experiencing the familiar sensation of being teleported by another being, it felt like it did with the witch, only this time, the presence he felt around him was a tender one.
When the light faded, they were in another place entirely, a rocky place, and open place, no longer in the forest.
Waltz dropped in the air the short distance to the ground, stumbling forwards before slowly righting himself.
Behind him he could hear Spirit coughing and retching, glancing tentatively around he saw Sumaey kneeling before him as Spirit rubbed at his throat, shoulders wracked as he continued to cough violently.
Before him Sumaey let out a heavy sigh, her body slumped.
‘Thank god you're alright’ she sighed with tears in her eyes.
‘What happened?’ Waltz asked her.
Sumaey glanced up at him with wide eyes, turning away from Spirit then, though it was clear from her expression that she was just as confused as he was.
Nearby Graham struggled to get to his feet, roaring in confusion, his normally beautiful pure white coat filthy and covered in dark mud.
‘Loxus!’ Waltz gasped, starting forwards upon sight of the great piece of metal just lying there against the rocks a few feet away. ‘Loxus…’ Waltz sighed, staring down as he stood over the spider-lantern.
The poor creature raised one of its spindly legs slowly, struggling to lift its mechanical tail off the ground, its movement was feeble.
‘Poor little guy…’
‘Is he alright?’ Sumaey spoke with worry in her tone, rising to her feet.
‘I don’t know’ Waltz mumbled. ‘Loxus…can you stand?’
The mechanical creature, who could understand the human language perfectly, but not speak it, gathered its feet beneath its body, however did not try to rise.
‘Oh Loxus…’ Waltz sighed miserably. ‘I’m sorry…’
Graham suddenly roared then, staring off into the distance and away.
‘Graham?’ Sumaey called after him.
But he was gone, suddenly running away without warning.
Spirit rose to his feet, rubbing his neck one last time before straightening and running after Graham.
‘What's going on?’ Sumaey groaned in frustration, making after them both.
Waltz lingered a moment longer, glancing back at Loxus lying before him.
‘I’ll come back my friend’ he uttered briefly to the creature, placing a hand upon the cold metal surface before turning away, ‘…I promise…’
Waltz ran at a jog, making his way after the others through the rocky environment.

It was a place very high up Waltz realised, as the wall of rock on one side of him opened up to reveal a world that was far below them.
Waltz slowed only very briefly, contemplating the beauty of all that was before his eyes, before tearing his sights away.
He continued to run, making his way around a corner of rock, skidding to a stop as he saw a figure before him, standing upon the rocks above the others that had stopped also.
'You!' Waltz cried, pointing an accusing finger at the man. 'You're the one that gave me that cursed map!'
The man half-turned back to him with a sneer on his lips, seemingly distracted by something else.
'What are you looking at?' Sumaey asked him suspiciously folding her arms.
'There was something here…' the man said distractedly, turning away again and looking towards the rocks behind him, '…something….' He clenched his jaw then, straightening up. 'It doesn't matter' he finished briskly, turning back to them.
'What are you doing here?' Waltz demanded.
The man sighed wearily, turning to face the others properly as they stood there before him, almost like in a theatre.
'I have grown tired of this façade' he told them, 'Yes I gave you that map, knowing it was false. Oh, and I was also the one to sell you that dodgy powder.'
'The liquid sunshine?' Waltz mumbled. 'Got anymore?'
'No' the stranger spoke loudly and hastily as Sumaey turned back to Waltz with a snarl, teeth gritted and ready to hit him. 'I don't carry that stuff around with me. Do you know the trouble I would get into if any authority caught me carrying that stuff around?'
'Well no one's going to catch you here are they?' Waltz glowered. 'What *are* you doing here anyway? Why are you following us?'
'I've grown tired of games' the man said to them, 'so have decided to come clean.' He paused then, considering the strange group before him. Waltz, the leader of this small guild, a man with pink hair, Sumaey, who stood there with her arms folded and a sneer upon her lips, the water elemental, and the stag-like creature, its snow-white fur now filthy. 'My name is Lyle' the stranger began, 'and I am here to dissuade you from your quest.'
Waltz frowned, raising an eyebrow at the man. He was average, and unremarkable, in every single way, with brown hair and dull eyes and average height, the man dressed in plain and dark clothes, with a dark mossy-green cloak around his shoulders.
'Lyle hu?' Waltz said, 'and why would you try to stop us on our quest? Do you even know what quest we are one?'
'As a matter of fact I do' the stranger Lyle replied.
'He's been watching us since we first reached the inn' Spirit voiced suddenly, glaring at the man suspiciously. 'I saw you through the window…you were watching Waltz and Sumaey at the notice board. Why do you care what quest is taken up?'
'You're a sharp one' Lyle smiled down at the elemental, whose eyes narrowed at the comment.
'You have some connection to this quest I imagine' Spirit continued 'perhaps you want the reward for yourself…perhaps……perhaps it's something else.'
'Ok maybe you should stop talking' Lyle said quickly.

‘So you have a connection to this quest then’ Waltz began, as Lyle’s attention slowly slid onto him. ‘You want to kill this creature before we do? Before anyone else gets the chance?’
‘No’ Lyle said, ‘quite the opposite. In fact, I want you to spare the life of this creature.’
This caught everyone off-guard, and they froze suddenly, lost for what to say.
‘You…want to save this creature’s life?’ Sumaey spoke incredulous. ‘But it’s been killing people…destroying crops and homes…’
‘Not to mention frightening people’s pets’ Waltz added hastily. ‘Let us not forget that little lost kitten.’
Sumaey glared at him.
‘I know…I know what you say is right but….’ Lyle broke off.
‘You have an attachment to this monster…’ Spirit said again, ‘but why…’
‘You say too much’ Lyle snapped angrily then, pointing an accusing finger at Spirit, who slowly bowed his head, expression growing dark.
‘Let’s not get ahead of ourselves’ Sumaey spoke hastily, grasping onto Spirits arm then.
The water elemental let out a slow breath, his body relaxing, though only slightly.
‘So what? You're going to stop us?’ Waltz asked the stranger.
‘Yes’ Lyle suddenly beamed happily at him now in a sarcastic manner. ‘I will do everything in my power.’
‘Why?’
‘Because none of your business that’s why.’
Waltz and Sumaey exchanged a confused glance, before both looking back at the man.
‘How do we know’ Waltz began, slowly drawing his weapon, ‘that *you* are not evil, that *you* are not a monster?’
Lyle tensed suddenly, head bowed to the others as Sumaey and Spirit too became tense, ready to summon their magic to them. Ready for whatever was to happen.
‘Why don’t we just kill you?’ Waltz calmly suggested, pointing the tip of his sword towards Lyle.
‘I know enough about your character’ Lyle told him. ‘You don’t kill people.’
‘You don’t know me’ Waltz whispered, though every word was clearly heard, ‘and besides…I've changed…I do kill people.’
Lyle took a step back as Sumaey and Spirit moved aside to give Waltz space as he advanced.
‘You will tell me what I need to know’ Waltz spoke dangerously, ‘or I *will* kill you.’
Lyle’s eye twitched then, slowly hunching his shoulders, he reached for something hidden beneath his cloak, a weapon perhaps.
Waltz summoned his magic to him, charging forwards to attack Lyle, his sword raised.
A sudden flash of light appeared between the two, and Waltz stopped dead in his tracks.
Lyle drew a slow gasp, shielding his eyes against the glare.
There stood between them, the ghostly figure of a child, a girl, wearing a rich blue dress.
‘What…is this?’ Waltz uttered, squinting through the glare.
The girl, her face hidden by the light, took a step towards Waltz, though her intentions seemed benign.
The girl reached towards him slowly, touching the sword and gently lowering it. Waltz relaxed slightly, lowering his shoulders.
He still could not see her face, though he saw her smile, as she tilted her head at him.

And then as quickly as she had appeared, she was suddenly gone, leaving behind her the natural and dim light of the mountains around them.
Waltz took a step back, suddenly uncertain, glancing around uncertainly.
He sheathed his sword.
'What was that?' he asked no one in particular.
'I believe this is the creature I saw earlier' Lyle said to him, 'and before you arrived, I sensed a great surge of magic around her. I believe she is the one who teleported you lot here, and I'm assuming by the state of you, you were in some kind of danger…'
The four of them exchanged hesitant glances at that, as Lyle watched them silently. Spirit was the first to speak.
'If what you say is true' the water elemental said, 'then that creature saved my life.' he paused. 'I will not harm you' he said to Lyle. 'That strange spirit…. seems to want to protect you.'
'Well what is it?' Waltz asked Lyle moodily.
'I don't know' Lyle admitted. 'I've never seen it before today.'
Waltz grumbled grudgingly.
'Let us be friends' Lyle suggested, extending a hand of friendship. 'It's not my wish to hurt you.'
'If that's the case then why did you lead us into that swamp?'
'I was merely trying to protect the creature you hunt.'
'Yeah but why?'
Lyle did not answer, he merely stood there, smiling back at Waltz silently.
Waltz let out a heavy sigh, shoulders slumped.
'Fine' he relented, taking the stranger's hand and shaking it. 'Friends then.'
'See?' the stranger said, his whole demeanour lighting up. 'Isn't that much better?'
'I guess' Waltz grumbled.
'So' Lyle began, 'now you know my name, tell me who each of you are.'
'My name is Waltz, I'm the leader of this guild.' He turned, indicating each of the others in turn. 'That's Sumaey' he indicated, 'and Spirit…and Graham….'
'I see.' Lyle scratched his chin. 'So this is your new guild then.'
Waltz stared.
'Who are you?' he asked the man. 'How do you know that? New guild?'
'You're missing a member of your guild' Lyle informed them. 'Loxus…the mechanical creature…oh relax' he added hastily, as Waltz's expression grew ever darker, 'I know your brother.'
'Sydney?' Waltz said with surprise.
'Yeah that's him' Lyle smirked.
'He's never mentioned you' Waltz continued with suspicion.
'We've only been working together recently' Lyle told him.
'Working together?' Waltz frowned. 'On what?'
'On none of your business, that's what.'
'I see' Waltz replied, narrowing his eyes. 'Its like that is it?'
He absentmindedly fiddled with the hilt of his sword then.
Whether Lyle noticed this or not was unclear, though he acted as if he didn't.

‘Let’s go find your missing guild member’ he offered. ‘I'm surprised you left him behind.’
‘It wasn’t by choice’ Waltz answered sulkily as Lyle walked past him, heading in the direction they had come from.
‘Where is he then?’ Lyle asked stopping after a time and glancing first one way then the other.
At that moment Graham trotted past him, guiding him, and roaring as he plodded along.
‘After you’ Lyle smirked, before making his way after the white stag. He sniffed the air deeply then, a frown crossing his face. ‘Is that strawberries I smell?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz smirked coming up beside him. ‘Graham smells very strongly of strawberries. A sorcerer did that to him.’
‘Why?’ Lyle asked, giving Waltz a sceptical look.
Close by Sumaey marched on silently as they headed back to Loxus, beside her as he always did, Spirit stuck close.
‘That’s quite a funny story you know’ Waltz grinned happily. ‘I don’t know if you know this, but Graham is actually human….well…originally…’
‘Was he now…’ Lyle spoke slowly, scratching his chin. ‘How interesting…’
They rounded the next boulder before them and came back to the place the guild had materialized, seeing Loxus still lying where he had fallen.
‘Oh, the poor thing…’ Lyle spoke approaching him.
As he did so Loxus tried again to lift his tail, his attempts were feeble, and he was unable to get the lantern (which hung from the end) off the ground. The fire inside had gone out.
Lyle knelt beside the strange mechanical spider-scorpion, and he reached out to it, running his hand across the metal surface of its body.
‘I sense a strong intelligence about this creature.’
‘Yeah he’s really smart’ Waltz chimed, standing behind Lyle with his arms folded. ‘Isn't that right Sumaey.’
‘He apparently possesses human-level of intelligence’ Sumaey droned beside him. ‘He can understand us perfectly, he is just unable to speak himself.’
‘I see’ Lyle mumbled, seeing Loxus’s pincer-mouth. ‘It would be cool to give him a voice box wouldn’t it…?’
Sumaey and Waltz exchanged a curious glance at that thought. Lyle bowed his head, taking a closer look at Loxus’s body.
‘His joints are caked with mud. If we can get him to some water…we could clean him…. maybe that would help.’
‘You think that would work?’ Waltz asked sceptically.
‘Maybe…’ Lyle mumbled, rising to his feet again. ‘I’ve never seen a creature like this before…it must be very rare…’
He straightened then, regarding Waltz and Sumaey and Spirit.
‘I need all of you to help me carry him.’

The four of them each grabbed two of his legs, even Graham helped by lifting the mechanical tail using his antlers, and so together with all five of them, they were able to carry Loxus down a path through the mountains, and to a wide and shallow river.
They dropped his body into the gentle current, each breathing heavily with the effort.

‘Dam he’s heavy’ Waltz gasped, wiping his brow, feeling hot with the effort. ‘How does he carry himself around all the time?’
Graham who had overheated in the excursion, immediately sat down in the cool water, panting heavily.
‘So you're still set on pursuing this creature?’ Lyle asked casually, kneeling down in the water and beginning to wash Loxus’s joints.
‘Are you still set on trying to stop us?’ Waltz countered, kneeling to do the same.
Lyle shot him a glower, which Waltz returned.
Sumaey who stood nearby with her arms folded, regarded both of them silently.
Beside her, Spirit as always stuck close to her, head bowed, he extended his arms them, using magic to lift the waters around them.
Waltz and Lyle rose to their feet, stepping back away from Loxus as he was consumed by the water, sweeping over his mechanical body.
Loxus didn’t move as the water washed over him, he remained where he was for several seconds, before bringing his feet beneath his body again, and rising.
Waltz’s expression broke out in a wide grin, as he clapped his hands happily.
‘He’s alright!’ Waltz cried out. ‘I’m so glad!’
Lyle and Sumaey both smiled as Loxus began to prance in the water, waving his great tail, the lantern on the end swinging back and forth merrily.
‘Let me get that for you’ Waltz offered, reaching up to the lantern and using his magic to light a flame. ‘That’s better’ he grinned merrily, closing the little glass door and kneeling before the strange mechanical creature. ‘That’s better isn’t it boy?!’
The creature’s eyes began to shine then, those dark metallic pieces.
Loxus stepped closer to Waltz who knelt in the water, soaking his clothes. Loxus waved his tail about, the lantern on the end jangling.
‘There’s a good boy’ Waltz gleamed patting the creatures metallic back.
‘Such a curious thing’ Lyle was speaking under his breath. ‘You say a sorcerer gave him to you?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz replied, rising to his feet, placing his hands on his hips and beaming down at the creature. ‘He was a sort of gift…a reward for completing a quest…’
Graham rose to his feet then, the water running from his white fur down his body, his body now clean from mud. He ran away then, Loxus made to go after him, and the two began to play.
‘Such a strange pair, aren’t they?’ Waltz commented.
‘They are’ Lyle agreed, ‘but then…’ he turned back to Waltz, ‘…this is a strange guild.’
Sumaey and Spirit look on silently.
‘I'm hungry’ Waltz spoke flatly. ‘Let’s go find an inn and rest.’
‘And then after that?’ Lyle asked loudly as he walked away.
‘We will slay this monster’ Waltz spoke with finality. ‘It is our job, and we need the money.’

Chapter Four
A Path to Darkness and Sinister Things

The strange band of six travelled down the rocky path to the foot of the mountains, from there traversing the winding road towards the nearest town.
It was getting dark, and with every passing moment, the lights from the houses before them became ever brighter.
Loxus and Graham led the way, the lantern which hung from the end of Loxus's tail swung back and forth with every move he made, the other walked in his wake.
They walked mostly in silence, Sumaey and Waltz side-by side, with Spirit trailing after them, and Lyle walking a short distance to the side.
Lyle cast a glance to the side towards the water elemental who walked with his head bowed, his eyes to the floor.
'You don't say much' Lyle noted, addressing the elemental.
The elemental continued to walk, raising his head slightly, dark eyes turned towards Lyle.
'I speak when I have something to say' the elemental replied.
'I never thought a creature like you would be travelling with a guild' Lyle noted, speaking aloud. 'Aren't you exactly the type of creature a guild would typically hunt and kill?'
Spirit was silent for a few moments as they continued to walk through the darkening world around them, then he spoke.
'Do you like pain?' Spirit asked Lyle.
Lyle smirked at this, turning away.
'Spirit is different' Sumaey offered, 'we came to his assistance in his time of need. I saved him.'
'So that's why he has such a fondness for you' Lyle said.
Sumaey slowed to a stop, regarding him with a stony expression.
'Why are you following us anyway? Why are you so interested in us?'
'Because I find you interesting' Lyle replied, glancing from her to Spirit and back again. 'Do you not think you are interesting? Such a guild as yours I have never seen before.'
'Yes' Sumaey told him shortly. 'We share an attachment, Spirit and I….I care for him very much.'
Spirit suddenly glanced towards her looking surprised. Lyle wasn't sure, but he thought for a moment that he saw the elemental smile, or perhaps he had imagined it.
'More to the point' Waltz interrupted stopping then, speaking firmly and folding his arms, much in the way that Sumaey did so often. 'You are far too interested in us for my liking.'
'I am protecting this creature' Lyle explained.
'Yeah. You said that' Waltz replied with dissatisfaction. 'But why?'
'Like I said' Lyle smiled warmly, though his tone was sharp. 'It's none of your business.'
Waltz frowned suspiciously. He wasn't happy with the situation, but Lyle was insistent on accompanying them.
Graham turned back to face them, suddenly letting out a roar. He and Loxus were some distance ahead now, waiting for the others to catch up.
'Come on' Sumaey sighed marching forwards. 'Let's get to this town so we can sleep in a proper bed. I've had enough adventure for the time being.'

They found an inn and stayed the night, renting also a stable for the night too for Loxus and Graham, ignoring the strange looks they got from the stable boys as they led the pair past the horses around them.
'I know you don't like it' Waltz was saying to Graham who looked angry (if a deer could look angry). 'It's only for one night, I'll make it up to you I swear I promise honestly.'
Thankfully this time, Graham did not protest. He stomped moodily into the stable, doing so with amazing reluctance and lack of speed.
Behind him, Loxus was already resting in the hay, his iron tail curled around his body. It was impossible to tell if he was alive, such a cold and expressionless thing. Waltz thought he'd call out to him to check (just in case), and Loxus raised the lantern at the end of his tail in response.
Waltz smiled warmly at that, before closing the stable door quietly and making his way back across the courtyard.
'I think he's getting used to it' Sumaey noted as Waltz returned to her side once more, referring to Graham allowing himself to be kept in the stable overnight.
'I hope so' Waltz mumbled glancing behind him briefly. 'Or maybe he's just tired.'
'Either way its convenient.'
Sumaey dipped her head.
'Where's Spirit?' Waltz asked.
'I don't know' Sumaey answered turning and gazing away then, looking towards the forests around the village. 'He is…somewhere….'
'He doesn't like other people, does he?'
'Can you blame him' Sumaey countered.
'And why are *you* still here?' Waltz asked, speaking to Lyle now.
'I have other business here in this town' Lyle answered sulkily as he leant against the sign post. 'We just happened to be travelling the same direction.'
A silence passed between them.
'It's beautiful' Sumaey sighed, tilting her head back to the moon, '…don't you think?'
Waltz smiled weakly.
'Come on' Waltz said walking past her and heading towards the inn where they were staying for the night. 'Let's get some rest.'
The two of them passed Lyle who remained where he was, leaning against the post, his gaze lingering on them as they went by.

The next morning

'There, a job suited just for you.'
Waltz groaned as Lyle placed the parchment upon the table before him. It was very early, and Sumaey and Waltz were both very tired. They were hoping to leave early to avoid him. But that hadn't worked out. It seemed Lyle had woken up far earlier then they had and was now wide awake. He had waited around, *just* for them.

‘Why are you still here?’ Waltz grumbled, leaning on his palm with his elbow on the table.
‘You want a job?’ Lyle pressed. ‘There.’
‘Still set on thwarting our success slaying this terrible beast eh?’ Waltz grinned in annoyance as Sumaey beside him took the parchment and began to read.
Waltz leant on his other hand, fist balled. He tilted his head wearily.
‘What does it say?’ He asked Sumaey in a flat voice.
‘Wraith’ she answered shortly.
‘Hmm?’ Waltz turned to her.
‘There’s not much of a reward for this’ Sumaey noted, giving Lyle a sceptical look.
‘And what good is a massive reward…’ he countered, ‘…if you're dead…? There is a reason some quests have bigger rewards. It’s because they are dangerous. The bigger the reward the more likely you are to die. Is that really what you want? Best to give up your other quest and go for this one instead.’
‘Ack. You're still going on about that?’ Waltz replied. ‘Just let it be…’
‘As long as you do as well.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz scoffed. ‘Fat chance.’
‘Then I won’t give up either.’
Sumaey and Waltz both glared at him simultaneously.
‘Do you feel that?’ Lyle asked suddenly sincere as he glanced about him.
‘What?’
‘A female presence…like before in the mountains….’ Lyle trailed off. ‘It doesn’t matter he finished hastily. Are you going to take this job?’ he asked them, pointing to the parchment that rested on the table before Sumaey now.
‘What about our original job?’ Waltz spoke aloud, asking no one in particular.
‘Listen’ Lyle began, seating himself opposite Waltz and Sumaey and steepling his fingers. ‘No one has taken that job…not for a long time…it is a dangerous creature and…’
‘That’s why it needs to be stopped’ Waltz interrupted.
‘But not by force’ Lyle insisted. ‘There are other means.’
‘It’s killing people and burning homes’ Sumaey spoke levelly. ‘Why wouldn’t we stop it using force?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz added as he began to shovel porridge into his mouth, ‘you won’t tell us why you don’t want this creature harmed…so why should we listen to you?’
‘The reward for that job is so high for a reason’ Lyle continued. ‘*This one*’ he indicated the parchment before Sumaey, ‘…is worth less than half…. but it is much safer…’
Sumaey glanced at Waltz, who was watching her.
He groaned wearily. ‘Alright…we’ll go for this job first…. but don’t think we won’t kill this other creature’ Waltz spoke warningly to Lyle. ‘It’s a menace and it needs to be stopped.’
Lyle bowed his head slowly, his eyes dark. But he said nothing.
‘And the sooner we deal with this wraith’ Sumaey said, rolling up the parchment and hiding it on her person, ‘…the sooner we can deal with this deadly creature…’

Sumaey and Waltz left the inn shortly after, crossing the courtyard towards the stables. Here they found Graham and Loxus, still fast asleep and snuggled tightly together.
‘Aww’ Sumaey couldn’t help but coo, ‘don’t they look sweet?’

‘They do’ Waltz beamed happily.
Waltz and Sumaey exchanged a glance, smiling to one another.
‘It’s a shame to wake them up’ Sumaey spoke quietly.
‘Yeah, I know’ Waltz grumbled, opening the lower half of the stable door and making his way towards them, ‘but…’
He knelt down on the hay beside them.
‘I guess our little adventure in the swamp must have worn them both out. Hey’ he said, reaching out to each of them and patting them gently. ‘It’s time to wake up.’
Graham lifted his head, blinking with tired and droopy eyes. Beside him Loxus did not move.
‘We’re off on another quest’ Waltz told them both, ‘we’re going to kill a wraith. Are you up for that?’
Graham leant forwards, resting his large white head on Waltz’s lap and sighing heavily.
Waltz smiled warmly, running his hand down Graham’s long head.
‘Come on’ he said rising swiftly. ‘Let’s get going, we can meet up with Spirit soon.’
Loxus drew his legs beneath him, rising and lifting his mechanical tail, the lantern on the end began to swing back and forth.
Waltz followed the pair out of the stables and back into the courtyard. Sumaey had already packed their bags beforehand, and the group were ready to go.
‘There you go’ Sumaey smiled at Graham, once she had saddled him up and put the bags on his back. ‘I hope that’s not too heavy for you.’
Graham’s only response was the rub his head against her leg then, trying to get that itch.
‘Ok good let’s go’ Sumaey voiced.
Waltz hung back for a moment, watching the three with a sort of pride. Sumaey walking ahead of them.
She paused then, glancing back at him with a frown.
Waltz raised his head then, observing her. This guild, Waltz’s guild, had not been together all that long. But they were beginning to grow closer, with every passing day, with every quest they completed, their bond was only strengthening, even Spirit was beginning to hate Waltz slightly less.
‘Hey slacker!’ Sumaey yelled back at him angrily. ‘Keep up!’
‘Y-yes!’ Waltz fumbled, breaking from his thoughts and rushing forwards then. ‘S-sorry.’
He hurried up to them and put the bag he carried (the last bag they had) on Graham’s back.
Graham did not complain. Nowadays he was usually willing to carry bags, usually, but still refused outride to be ridden like a horse, and the guild still lacked any form of real transport.
Horses were expensive, and for the longest time Waltz had dreamed of having his own. But it had not been possible yet, and he watched with envy others riding their own horses pass them by as they left the small town.
‘Don’t look so downtrodden’ Sumaey glanced at him.
Waltz baulked. ‘I wasn’t looking downtrodden!’ he spoke hastily, ‘…was I?’
Spirit joined them as they were leaving the town. He didn’t like crowds, and didn’t trust other people, especially those that belonged to a guild, as his parents had been killed by warriors, and now he held a profound and simmering hatred for all strangers, especially those part of any guild, for he trusted no one. He stayed with Waltz in this guild however, because of Sumaey, because she had saved his life. He loved her.

‘Hey!’ Waltz (the leader of this strange little guild) cried jovially as Spirit approached them, stepping out from between the trees.
‘Don’t touch me’ Spirit hissed, and Waltz quickly removed his hand from the elemental’s shoulder, grinning sheepishly.
‘So how far is this trip?’ Waltz asked Sumaey off-handedly, turning away from Spirit then and ignoring him.
‘Eight to nine days’ she replied casually.
‘Eighty nine days!’
‘No. Eight TO nine days you moron!’ Sumaey snapped. ‘Dammit Waltz open your ears.’
‘So how long if we had a horse?’ Waltz lamented.
Sumaey smirked, turning away from him. ‘Oh please. Don’t torture yourself.’

Eight to nine days later, they reached their destination, a place that was serene, yet almost eerily quiet. The land immediately around them was flat, but a little further away, and the closer they got to the village, the terrain began to warp, forming into jagged rocks and peaks.
The band of travellers had set out early on that morning because of the cold, and as they walked, a strange mist clung to their ankles. But Sumaey had reassured Waltz that is was completely natural, explaining in very technical terms how mist was formed.
‘You're letting your fears and imagination get to you’ Sumaey scowled at him. ‘Just relax. We’re not quite there yet.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled in reply, not wanting to break the silence around by speaking too loudly. ‘I guess you're right.’
They slowed to a stop as they reached a gateway, where there were two small towers either side of the road they traversed, guarded by a single lazy man.
The gate now closed blocked their path.
‘Hey’ Waltz whispered to the man. ‘*Heeeeeeeeeey.’*
‘Eh? What? Who goes there?’
The tired young man fumbled to his feet, blinking wearily as he rose, looking down at the ground.
‘A guild?’ the confused looking young man of about seventeen said upon sight of them and the weapons they carried. ‘And what is that?’
‘It’s rude to point’ Sumaey told him as he indicated the water elemental.
Spirit ignored him completely, instead surveying their surroundings.
‘Oh waw’ the man went on, as his attention travelled to the other members of the guild. ‘A strange white stag…and a mechanical spider-scorpion thingy…’
Graham raised his head, regarding the guard silently with his amber eyes.
‘So you're the guild that has taken up this quest to save us from this wraith?’ the man asked.
‘The very same’ Waltz replied, touching a hand to his forehead.
‘Excellent’ the young man said rubbing his hands together energetically. ‘Hold on a sec I’ll be right down.’
His head dipped from view, they heard some shuffling sounds, a heavy thud, then the man came from around the base of the small wooden tower.

‘If you’d like to follow me’ the man grinned merrily at them.
Upon closer inspection, he looked to be more a farmer than anything else.
‘This way!’ he cried, dancing off up the hill after opening the gates for them.
He set off on his way, whistling joyfully to himself and lifting his feet high as he walked. Waltz surveyed him as they followed, the figure was mature, though still seemed young at heart, he looked younger still, the way his oversized helmet came over his eyes slightly, and the spear by his side far larger than it should have been. He almost looked like a young boy in a fairy tale setting off on some wild adventure.
‘So what's your story then?’ the man asked them, once he had grown tired of whistling. ‘My name is Andrew by the way.’
‘Well’ Waltz began, ‘Andrew. There’s not much to tell really. And it’s nice to meet you by the way.’
‘Nice to meet you too’ Andrew winked back. ‘And come now’ he frowned in amusement as they marched their way up the rocky and winding road. ‘I doubt that very much. I will admit I haven’t travelled all that much, and I have not seen much of the world beyond my village home, but I've seen my fair share of guilds pass through here, and none have been like yours.’
‘Yes well’ Waltz smirked back at him, ‘ours is rather special.’
They entered the village, or to be more specific, they had entered the village some time ago, but here was its heart and it was utterly deserted, with the thin mist still clinging close to the ground.
‘Where are all the villagers?’ Sumaey asked with just a hint of worry in her tone.
‘They don’t come out until the sun has fully risen’ Andrew replied. ‘They're too scared of the wraith.’
‘And what about you? Waltz asked the young man sceptically. ‘You're not afraid of it too?’
‘Nah’ Andrew waved away. ‘Not me. I'm tough.’ His expression turned serious then, as the smile slid from his face, ‘and besides’ he added in a firm tone, ‘it doesn’t come that far out, not away from the lake anyway, not as far as the towers.’
‘The lake?’
‘That’s where it lives’ Andrew explained. ‘I will show you, but I won’t go all the way. I don’t want to see the wraith at all.’
‘Understood’ Waltz nodded. ‘Take us there.’

They walked slowly along the winding road, the slope of the rocky hill gently ascending.
‘It’s actually nice here’ Spirit spoke up, lifting his chin and tilting his head to the side, ‘its….peaceful.’
Waltz watched him with a peculiar expression.
‘You have a strange opinion on what’s peaceful’ Waltz said to him. ‘I find this place just a little creepy.’
‘No’ Spirit spoke with surety, ‘look around.’
Waltz swallowed the lump in his throat, his attention drifting away again.
‘Nope. Its still creepy’ Waltz declared.
‘That’s because you’re blind’ Spirit said to him.
They walked for a few more minutes in silence before Andrew slowed to a stop.

‘Here it is’ he said, tipping his head back towards the end of their road, where the path sharply rose leading into a canyon, beyond which nothing could be seen, only the white light of the sky.
‘I will go no further’ Andrew said, ‘I leave the rest to you.’
‘Thank you’ Waltz answered. ‘I’m sure we will meet up again.’
‘I’m sure’ Andrew echoed, ‘or at least I hope so, because if we don’t…that means you wouldn’t have made it.’ He smiled. ‘Good luck!’ he said making his way briskly back down the hill. ‘I hope it doesn’t kill you!’ he began to whistle merrily to himself as he made his way.
Each member of the guild watched him as he went, even Loxus seemed to be watching, though none could be sure of this.
‘I wonder what this day has in store for us’ Sumaey mumbled absentmindedly.
‘Let’s find out’ Waltz spoke confidently, turning away from the whistling young man and towards the road which led to the canyons, the great walls of rock either side the path were tall, imposing, and to Waltz were slightly scary.
‘Scary’ Waltz gleamed looking up. ‘But only slightly. Alright’ he said clapping his hands and marching forwards briskly. ‘This wraith isn’t going to defeat itself, and we need that reward. Let’s get going aaahhaawwwhaahawwwha hawww.’

Chapter Five
Shore of the Rocky Lake

The strange band of five traversed the rocky canyon, with its jagged slightly-scary looking grey stone walls, looming imposingly either side.
‘A rather fitting environment don’t you think?’ Waltz commented at one point.
When they broke free from the canyons, they saw before them a great lake, unlike any they had seen before.
‘Tell me’ Sumaey voiced, ‘is that normal?’
‘It sure isn’t’ Waltz answered.
They exchanged a glance, before Waltz turned away, Sumaey looking back towards the lake.
Waltz reached into one of the bags that Graham carried, rummaging for a few moments before pulling out a small glass bottle. It was empty.
He knelt at the shore of the lake, filling the bottle with the water from the lake, before rising, hold the bottle before them and examining it.
‘The water…’ he said with a frown, ‘it’s black. The water itself is black, not just the bed of the lake, the actually water….is black…’
‘There’s a first for everything’ Sumaey muttered.
‘Spirit’ Waltz said, turning to the elemental. ‘Do you think you could check it out?’
‘I’ll see what I can do’ Spirit replied, stepping forwards into the water.

The jet-black water of the lake did not faze him in the slightest, and he walked onwards, until the water reached his shoulders. Then he drew a slow breath, blinking slowly, and slipping beneath the surface, doing so very gently, and barely causing a ripple. A few moments later, the surface of the lake returned to its glass-like state.
Waltz shifted uncomfortably, scratching at his head as he quickly became restless.
Sumaey cast him a glance.
'Be calm' she told him. 'He'll be alright.'
Waltz let out a groan, frowning then. But he didn't say anything.
Silence ensued. Graham lowered his head cautiously to the water, sniffing at it, while on his other side, Loxus reached out one of his spindly mechanical legs, touching the water itself.
Sumaey and Waltz looked on silently.
'I wonder where she is…' Waltz spoke, his quiet voice seemingly to echo in the silent mountains, '…the wraith…….'

They waited in silence for the longest time, and as Waltz glanced up past the mountains, he saw the sky begin to lighten.
There was a ripple in the water, and Waltz's attention snapped back. Beside him, Sumaey unfolded her arms, her body relaxed.
A body emerged from the water, it was Spirit. He walked carefully forwards, barely disturbing the water. He stepped out of the lake, coming to stand between Waltz and Sumaey, his head bowed and staring ahead of him, eyes out of focus.
'There is nothing in there' he mumbled. 'The lake is empty.'
Loxus who had been touching the water drew a spindly leg back then, and Graham looked around, glancing towards Spirit.
'If the wraith is not in the lake…' Sumaey voiced, 'then where is she?'

The small group left the mountains, heading back downhill, back towards the village. And by this time, the villagers were awake.
'Hey!' a stranger wearing a straw hat called out to them. 'Are you the guild here to help us?'
'We sure are' Waltz said bowing low and dramatically to the man. 'Pleasure to make your acquaintance.'
The man clapped and nodded approvingly. 'Very good' the stranger said, 'very good.'
'Hey is that the guild?' a child called out.
'They're here!' an even more distant voice hollered. 'They're here! Come look!'
In no time at all, the small guild was surrounded. The villagers ooed and aahhed over the group. The children (and adults too) reached out tentatively to touch Loxus's cold surface, and Graham bowed his head, sniffing feverishly at the hands of one of the children, searching for any food as one of the other children tugged on his long tail playfully.
'I've never seen such a guild before' one of the figures (an older man who stood tall) said to them.
'And who might you be?' Sumaey requested.
'I am the head of the village' the smiling man beamed happily, 'and you are here to help us.'
'We checked the lake' Waltz said to him, 'it was empty.'
'You checked the lake?' the head of the village echoed.

‘I am a water elemental’ Spirit voiced. ‘I swam to the bottom, and swam all around and searched every crevasse. The lake is empty.’
‘A water elemental?’ the head of the village said.
‘Ooooooooh’ a collective voice from around them sounded then.
‘That would explain the blue skin’ the head of the village grinned. ‘And the lake was empty?!’
A collective gasp was suddenly heard around them from the people who listened, they were shocked to hear this news.
Waltz smirked at the crowd in amusement.
‘So what can you tell us about the wraith?’
‘Ah’ the head of the village sighed. ‘My name is Bekket by the way. Nice to meet you.’
‘Likewise,’ Waltz grinned.

Waltz, Sumaey, Spirit and Bekket sat in a quiet spot, in the shelter before one of the homes, the low overhanging roof made of thatch. It was cool here where they sat, the low wooden table between them held many glasses of water.
‘Ahhh’ Waltz sighed with contentment. ‘Tasty…’
Bekket glanced to the side, seeing Graham walking away with his head bowed, a small group of children following him, and Loxus could be seen a short distance away from him, lying peacefully in the sun.
‘Such a bright day today’ Bekket said squinting as he watched Graham. ‘His white coat glows so beautifully…and his metal body…’ he said looking towards Loxus now, ‘…its so bizarre…’
‘He was a gift to us’ Waltz told the man. ‘Loxus I mean. A sorcerer gave him to us.’
‘And is he human?’
‘In his mind…’ Waltz turned to face the man. ‘Loxus cannot speak, but he can understand human language perfectly. So this wraith…’ he said suddenly changing the subject, ‘when did it first appear?’
Spirit bowed his head, closing his eyes silently, becoming still.
Bekket frowned then, taking a reluctant sigh.
‘This creature has been terrifying the villagers for weeks, first appearing suddenly about a month or so ago. There seems to be no pattern, no consistency, it appears to come at random, though always comes at night or on cloudy days.’
‘That’s perhaps why we couldn’t find it around the lake’ Waltz pondered aloud, staring up at the bright sky above.
‘It doesn’t explain why it couldn’t be found inside the lake itself’ Spirit mumbled in a low voice. ‘And why the lake is black like that?’
‘The lake is cursed’ Bekket told them. ‘This wraith is evil. Every plant she touches, every tree, every blade of grass…water…wood…fabrics everything…. becomes cursed.’
‘Cursed?’ Waltz echoed.
‘Water turns black and becomes undrinkable, vegetation dries up and crumbles, wood of the homes she enters rots and collapses…and the livestock…’ he trailed off then.
‘Has the wraith ever killed or hurt anyone?’ Sumaey asked.

‘No’ Bekket shook his head. ‘Only some of the livestock have died…and that’s only because of the grass they ate that she cursed…the water they drank…’
‘So it was an accident?’ Sumaey voiced.
Bekket raised his head.
‘She does not sound all that hostile to me’ Sumaey said.
‘Not hostile?’ Bekket glowered. ‘She comes here and terrifies the villagers, sometimes in the middle of the night, she screams and screeches and howls as if in pain…sometimes she enters the houses, tearing through the rooms, breaking everything in reach.’
‘But she never hurts anyone?’
Bekket tilted his head curiously at Sumaey.
‘What are you getting at?’ he asked her, speaking slowly, suspicion heavy in his voice.
‘Nothing’ she replied. ‘I'm just trying to make the pieces fit.’
‘A wraith’ Waltz spoke in a mumble, scratching at his chin, ‘a cursed being. How much do you know of wraiths?’
‘I'm just a simple villager’ Bekket replied, leaning forwards on his knees, ‘I know how to handle the horses, how the sow the fields…’
‘Okaaaay?’ Waltz mumbled.
‘Care to share your wisdom then?’ Bekket asked him.
Waltz paused then in thought before speaking. ‘I have been doing what I do for a long while’ Waltz said, ‘I have been a member of several different guilds in my time, have travelled far, have fought and killed many creatures, but I have never come across a wraith before, they are not common creatures, and are rarely seen.’
‘What else do you know of them?’ Bekket asked him, sounding eager yet a little nervous at the same time.
‘How they are created’ Waltz breathed. ‘They are the souls of humans who have died in tragedy, they are unable to pass on peacefully to the afterlife because of certain ties that hold them to this world.’ Waltz paused then. ‘This wraith’ he began, speaking slowly as he thought, choosing his words carefully, ‘she must be someone here from the village. You said the haunting started a few weeks ago. Was there are woman who died around that time?’
Bekket faltered then, his brow furrowed. ‘Yes’ he said, sounding surprised at his own words, ‘now that you mention it…’
‘What happened?’ Waltz asked tentatively.
Bekket sighed, bowing his head.
‘That is a very sad story’ Bekket spoke, ‘her name was Anya, and she was a beautiful woman, a dark river of hair, black and beautiful, dark eyes, and flawless skin. She was slender and graceful, athletic, and intelligent, the perfect woman many might have said. She was like a princess, a queen even.’ Bekket fell silent for a moment, collecting his thoughts; a forlorn expression crossed his face. ‘Several months ago, there were these dark beasts…shadow creatures, that appeared suddenly without explanation. Are you familiar with them?’
‘Yes’ Waltz nodded briefly. ‘They are dark spirits formed from the hatred and greed of men, most common in times of war…they can linger for decades. They travel randomly from place to place, doing so without purpose.’

Bekket nodded at this, continuing on. 'They were mostly lesser beings, but among them were stronger spirits.' He paused. 'They would attack the village at nights, and linger around the woods. We are not skilled fighters here, we are farmers mostly, but some of us could still fight if we had to. Several men rode out into the woods to kill the spirits, but that was a grim night, and several men were killed.'
Sumaey blinked slowly, raising her head.
'They fought for a long time, and their screams were heard from the village. Anya, who was married to one of the men ran out to the woods to her husband, only to find him dead. The spirits attacked her, cut her up really bad. Her face was horribly scared, and she was bleeding everywhere, we thought that we would lose her, that she would die that night. When she heard her husband had been killed by the spirits, she wanted to give up…but it was the thought of her children that kept her fighting. She survived her ordeal, but things were never the same after that, as she grieved for her deceased husband. It was a loss for us all, many of us lost friends and fathers and brothers that night.'
Waltz bowed his head. 'And then what happened?'
'The spirits attacked the village. We were unprepared, several more people were killed that night, and Anya…she…abandoned her children.'
'What do you mean?' Sumaey frowned.
'They were playing outside, many people saw them, and when the spirits attacked, Anya ran back into the house, leaving her children alone outside.' He paused then. 'One of the children was killed, the youngest brother, sixteen. His older brother, eighteen, survived. Anya was treated as a monster after that, she was outcast from the village for abandoning her children like that. She was punished.'
'How?' Sumaey asked.
'She was chained up outside and left to the spirits.'
'You killed her?' Sumaey asked incredulous.
'She abandoned her children' Bekket said. 'Only one survived, but only just. He spent a long time fighting for his life. We are a close-knit community, we look out for each other. The younger child may have survived, if Anya had acted like the mother she should have been.'
'So you take the mother away from the remaining child?' Sumaey asked.
'She had to be punished' Bekket said evenly. 'What kind of a mother abandons her own children? It's clear she didn't care for them.'
'But that makes no sense' Sumaey voiced as Waltz beside her straightened up, Spirit remaining completely silent. 'Why would she risk her life for her husband and then abandon her children?'
'I don't claim to understand her' Bekket replied turning to her.
'So that's why she's vengeful' Waltz spoke up, 'because she's angry at what was done to her.'
'So it would seem' Bekket replied stoically.
'But you've mentioned that she's never hurt anyone' Sumaey voiced.
Bekket turned to her in silence.
'What is she doing visiting this village?' Sumaey asked him.
'She terrorises the people' Bekket replied. 'She is angry.'
'Hm' Sumaey frowned unconvinced. 'If she is angry then why hasn't she hurt anyone?'

‘Like I said’ Bekket shrugged. ‘I don’t understand her. I doubt anyone does.’
‘Something is missing’ Spirit spoke up suddenly, breaking his silence. ‘I feel we are not seeing the whole picture.’
Bekket, Sumaey and Waltz turned to face him, all regarding him silently.
‘How long has this wraith been visiting this village?’
‘Since the night she was killed’ Bekket shrugged.
‘She wasn’t by the lake’ Waltz told him. ‘Is there anywhere else she might be?’
‘Not that I know of’ Bekket shrugged apologetically. ‘When she’s not here in the village frightening the people…’ he paused, ‘the lake is the only other place she’s been spotted. She’s never been seen in the surrounding lands.’
‘I see I see’ Waltz nodded. ‘Yes…it’s becoming clearer to me.’
‘Is it?’ Bekket asked with surprise.
Waltz straightened then, slapping his hands on his knees and smiling. ‘I guess all we have to do now is to wait. Is there somewhere we can stay?’
‘Oh’ Bekket fumbled, ‘I…I don’t think so, I'm really sorry.’
‘Anything will do, some stables…something with shelter, a cover over our heads. I see some dark clouds in the distance. I would rather get rained on.’
‘We have some shelters for the animals’ Bekket said awkwardly, ‘but we don’t have much more than that. If that is alright with you…’
‘No, it’s perfect!’ Waltz grinned happily. ‘We would be happy to rest there.’

‘We don’t have much in this village’ Bekket shrugged a short while later, as they stood before a crude shelter, which was nothing but a single wall made of wooden beams, and a roof made of thatch.
‘I think it’s beautiful in its simplicity’ Waltz grinned. ‘Thank you so much.’
‘I know it’s not a lot’ Bekket smiled awkwardly, ‘but we are only a small village.’
‘No’ Waltz smiled again, ‘it’s perfect.’
Bekket nodded to them all. ‘If there is anything we can do for you…. food and water and clothes and anything else…please don’t hesitate to ask.’
‘Of course’ Waltz said with a nod and a bow, ‘thank you.’

Waltz and Sumaey watched the village around them from their little shelter home, sitting upon the simple wooden bench side by side. Spirit had left them then, seeking to be alone. He felt uncomfortable in the crowds, and often sought solitude. Spirit had a deep mistrust of people, and only seemed to trust and care for Sumaey, even after their time spent together, he still did not trust Waltz, though Waltz was convinced at least that Spirit did not hate him anymore.
‘What a peaceful life’ Waltz was saying. ‘You know I've secretly wanted to be a farmer, I crave the simple life…sometimes, its nice travelling the map and seeing all these wonderful things and experiencing all these dangers, but sometimes I want more from life.’
‘And by more from life do you mean less?’ Sumaey asked. ‘Being a farmer? And anyway, I thought you said you wanted to be an innkeeper when you retire. Because after all…’ she turned to face him, ‘you don’t plan on dying. Isn’t that what you said?’

Waltz grinned happily at her. ‘That’s right, I'm going to share my wisdom with people who pass through my inn, I'm going to have the most wonderful inn, it’s going to be warm and cosy…’
‘You need money for that’ Sumaey told him.
‘I know’ Waltz said. ‘I am saving up my pennies, even now, I put aside a little here, a little there, and one day I'm going to own the most beautiful inn, with fields and horses.’ A dreamy expression crossed his face. ‘I enjoy these adventures’ Waltz was saying, ‘but I can’t do it forever.’ He paused then. ‘I think we make a great team’ he spoke, suddenly changing the subject, ‘the five of us.’
‘Yeah’ Sumaey smiled, turning to face him. ‘I think we’re a great guild.’
‘That means a lot’ Waltz grinned merrily. ‘I hope we are worthy as a guild.’
Sumaey blinked slowly, a smile spreading across her face. She turned away, looking towards the villagers around them as they went about their day.
‘A simple life’ Sumaey breathed, ‘a home. I wonder where my home is.’
‘You still have no memory?’ Waltz asked her, ‘even after all this time?’
‘No’ Sumaey shook her head sadly. ‘I want to know where I come from, if I even have a home…parents….’ She pursed her lips. ‘I wonder if anyone is missing me.’
‘You are a mystery’ Waltz gleamed at her. ‘You’re so exciting.’
‘You think so?’
‘You fell from the sky’ Waltz said to her, ‘with no memory of anything. Of course I find you interesting.’ He looked a little sad then. ‘I know I promised to help you learn of your past and who you are, and I haven’t forgotten…I swear but….’
‘I know’ Sumaey spoke sadly, ‘and I understand.’ She smiled to him. ‘I like being in this guild.’
‘Is it the company?’ Waltz asked flirtatiously, leaning forwards on his knees and raising an eyebrow.
‘Spirit, Loxus and Graham are wonderful company’ Sumaey replied.
‘And me?’ Waltz asked.
‘What about you?’ Sumaey asked flatly.
‘Oh come on’ Waltz scoffed. ‘That’s so cruel…’
Sumaey bowed her head, giggling into her hand. ‘I like it here’ she said, watching Loxus and Graham lying in the sun side by side some distance away from them, the villagers having sated their curiosity left them alone now.
Waltz watched them with a smile on his face.
‘We should get some rest’ Sumaey said, turning to the bags beside them and beginning to unpack them. ‘I'm tired…if we have to face a wraith, then we should get some sleep before that time, Loxus and Graham have the right idea.’
Waltz tilted his head back as Sumaey rolled out a mat, lay down on top of it and falling still. Waltz closed his eyes contentedly, breathing a slow sigh.
‘It’s so peaceful here’ he whispered to himself. ‘It’s hard to believe this place is plagued by such a creature.’

They slept peacefully that night, Waltz and Sumaey side by side beneath the simple shelter, with a roof over their heads.
It rained, but it was a light and gentle rain, the pitter patter of raindrops pinging off Loxus' metallic body was a soothing sound, almost heavenly, celestial.
At one point Sumaey woke, rolling over onto her back and opening her eyes. Graham lay beside them also beneath the shelter, completely dry, Loxus just beyond the shelter. The rain didn't seem to faze him. Spirit at this time, was out of sight. They didn't know where he was, but he would often vanish. Sumaey believed he loved the guild deep down, but he had a lonely heart.
Sumaey sat up, gazing up towards the heavens at the beautiful black starry night.
'Waltz' she whispered, nudging him awake.
'Mmh?'
'Look.'
Waltz sat up too, rising to his feel he followed Sumaey as they moved away from the shelter.
The sky was lit up in a gentle purple glow, the stars scattered across the sky burning brightly, billions of them. Sumaey's eyes shone as she stared up at the cosmos.
'In all my life,' Sumaey breathed, staring up at the heavens, 'I have never seen such a sight…'
'The gods are smiling down upon us' Waltz uttered, his radiant smile glowing in the purple light. 'I take it as a good omen. Things are about to happen that will be in our favour.'
'You say that about everything' Sumaey smirked in amusement.
They shared a brief glance, before looking back up towards the sky. All around them watching silently, leaning out of windows and hovering in doorways, were the villagers, gazing in wonder at the spectacle. Waltz glanced about him at the many eyes as they stared upwards, before looking at the shadows on the ground around them.
'No wraith' he noted, speaking to Sumaey happily. 'That is a good sign in itself.'
'For now,' she frowned, before falling silent and gazing back upwards. 'What a beautiful world it must be up there…'

Chapter Six
The Wheat Fields

The next morning the guild ate around a large table, the food was brought to them by the villagers, even Graham was being well cared for. They offered the white deer all sorts of food, but in the end, it was hay that he favoured, hay and oats, though he did have a few slices of toast.
'What about the creature with the blue skin?' a young woman asked Waltz as she placed a bowl of fruit before him.
'He doesn't like crowds' Waltz explained, 'in fact, he doesn't like anyone, not even me…I don't think so anyway…'

‘What?’ the woman laughed.
‘He is very suspicious and mistrustful of people’ Waltz explained. ‘At least he doesn’t hate me anymore’ he added in a grumble. ‘The only one he really likes and trusts is Sumaey.’
Sumaey glanced up at the sound of her name.
‘Why does he feel that way for you?’ the woman asked. ‘If you don’t mind me asking.’
‘I am the one who gave him his name’ Sumaey told the woman. ‘I was there to protect him in his time of need, and he has formed a very strong attachment to me which has remained since that day.’
‘Oh I see’ the woman smiled.
She cleared Waltz’s plate away, replacing it with another filled with food.
‘Yummy’ Waltz declared, before digging in.
‘So what does Loxus eat?’ another villager asked them, glancing away at the strange mechanical device.
‘Well we haven’t actually fed him yet’ Sumaey replied to the old man. ‘We don’t know if he eats anything at all.’
‘He must eat *something*’ the old man said peering at Loxus.
Sumaey and Waltz exchanged a glance, but neither of them spoke.
‘I should get back to work soon’ the man said, ‘if there is anything you want then please don’t hesitate to let us know.’
‘Will do!’ Waltz waved happily.
The man heisted.
‘Is everything alright?’ Sumaey asked him, looking up.
The man smiled awkwardly. ‘Yes, it’s just…’ he frowned then. ‘The wraith is on everyones mind, we are just eager to see it gone.’
‘Oh don’t you worry’ Waltz spoke confidently, leaning forwards on his elbows and giving the man a knowing expression. ‘We will put that creature from your thoughts.’
The man’s brow furrowed slightly. ‘It is evil’ he said. ‘I am not the only one who wants to see her gone.’
‘She’s not evil’ Waltz spoke up, causing the old man to fall silent.
Beside Waltz, Sumaey watched the man silently, clearly sharing the same opinion.
‘I think the wraith is just angry, misunderstood’ Waltz said. ‘I am eager to see this through to the end and a happy conclusion.’
The man blinked uncertainly, clearly not understanding. He bowed his head then, smiling at the two, moving off after that.
‘Did you enjoy your breakfast?’ a young woman said to them a short while later.
They left the table with the woman after that, Waltz, Sumaey, Loxus and Graham. The woman whose name was Cassie, claimed to be a holy figure.
‘We don’t have any shrines around here’ Cassie was saying, ‘we’re just a small village, and we don’t have a lot of money to build a temple or anything like that.’
‘So where do you worship?’ Waltz asked her, as they made their way across the wheat field and towards the edge of the forest where a small stream trickled along its winding path peacefully.
‘Here’ Cassie said to them, pulling back a curtain of ivy to reveal a wall fountain, in the middle there was a large face, its mouth open, and water running down its tongue and into the

bowl below. ‘It’s only small’ Cassie smiled shyly. ‘The villagers come here sometimes to pray.’ Cassie bowed her head. ‘Sometimes prayers get answered.’
‘Do you pray?’ Waltz asked, stepping beside her and gazing at the modest fountain.
‘Yes’ Cassie said, blushing slightly. ‘I do.’
Behind them Loxus remained impassive, expressionless with his metal face as Graham beside moved forward to sniff the fountain. He moved as if about to drink from it, before Sumaey grabbed him by the horn, pulling him back and glaring at him.
‘And what do you pray for?’ Waltz asked Cassie, ignoring the others and doing his best to pretend they were invisible.
‘Oh’ Cassie waved him away with a smile. ‘All sorts really…’
Waltz was about to politely be nosy when Sumaey suddenly gasped.
It wasn’t a gasp of slight surprise, but one of genuine shock, but Waltz did not look around at once, he was still facing ahead.
‘What is it?’ he asked Sumaey casually without turning.
‘Look you idiot!’
Waltz blinked carelessly at her, before turning a second later.
‘…oh…’
Before them at the edge of the wheat field, was the wraith, a terrifying spectacle. A grim figure that hovered in the air, with a body that emanated a grey-green glow, the face was scarred, and the hair and the tattered dress lifted and swayed as if underwater.
Cassie shrieked in terror, recoiling behind Waltz who drew his sword, the blade singing, the single sound resonating through the air.
The wraith leant forwards in the air, screaming at them. Her call travelled far, and Waltz and the others could already hear cries from the village as people at the edge of the field on the other side spotted the wraith. They ran to their homes, and moments later, a bell began to ring.
‘I know what you are’ Waltz spoke bravely, pointing his sword at the wraith, ‘and I want to show everyone the truth, to make them see clearly at last.’
Beside him Sumaey had summoned magic to her, her hands consumed in blue flame. Loxus was agitated, and Graham whipped his long tails, pawing at the ground and bowing his head.
Loxus leapt forwards suddenly without warning, Waltz cried for him to stop.
The wraith leant back, casting her arms out. Loxus’s movements slowed as he reared up, towering over the ghostly figure.
There were a series of clicks, and Loxus’s body slowly began to fall, collapsing to the ground and twitching and jerking around. His long tail flopped back and forth, the lantern on the end toppled to the side, and candle within had gone out.
The wraith drew back sharply, gliding backwards, the tattered trails of her dress dragging after her.
The wraith turned, shooting off with unnatural speed.
‘Hey wait!’ Sumaey called after Waltz as he leapt upon Graham’s back, kicking his sides hard like one would to a horse.
Graham leapt forwards, charging off, Sumaey tried to stop them, but they were both out of her reach. Her hair and skirt lowered again, the gush of wind was strong as they shot past her. Sumaey reached to them as they went, grasping at the air.

She gritted her teeth, stepping back. Sumaey shot a glance back at Cassie.
'Watch over Loxus' she breathed, before running forwards as fast as she could, her red skirt trailing after her as she went.
She made after Waltz and Graham, as they headed back towards the hill, back towards the dark lake where the wraith was said to reside.
Cassie reached a hand out to them, pausing with her arm still extended.
She smiled then, lowering her hand and casting a glance over towards Loxus, the strange mechanical spider-like creature, with its scorpion-like tail, the lantern now extinguished at the end, resting upon the ground.
She approached the still mechanical body, kneeling next to it.
'Do not worry' she smiled knowingly, 'everything will be fine.'

Waltz and Graham reached the black lake, Graham skidding to a stop and roaring loudly.
'My god' Waltz breathed, staring forwards with eyes wide.
The wraith hovered before him a distance away, above the rocky shore beside the lake. She had stopped now and faced him, the trails of her dress swaying gently in the wind.
'Don't fight me!' Waltz called out to her.
She lifted in the air slightly, the strips of her dress shooting towards him then, wrapping themselves around Grahams body. Graham reared up, immediately beginning to struggle, roaring even louder now and kicking his legs and tossing his head.
Waltz leapt off the back of the stag, rolling to the side and facing the creature again, body crouched with one hand splayed on the floor beneath him, his other on his weapon, though he did not draw it again.
'Don't fight!' he called out to the wraith. 'Please!'
But the wraith did not listen, it continued to watch Waltz, while at the same time, its tendrils tightening around Graham's body, squeezing the air from him.
Graham let out another roar, weaker this time, falling to a knee.
The stag was losing consciousness, struggling to breathe.
Waltz whipped his head around towards Graham, before looking back at the wraith, his teeth gritted.
He drew his sword, lunging to the side and cutting the cloth that held Graham.
The wraith fell backwards, shrieking in rage at this, before charging forwards again, towards Waltz this time. Waltz lashed out now in self-defence, struggling to see as the fabric of the wraith's dress whipped around him in a high wind, he concentrated on freeing himself and getting away from her as she tried to trap him, retreating to a safe distance so he could assess the situation. But he could not get away.
Graham bowed his head suddenly, charging for the wraith, trying to protect Waltz.
'Graham no!'
Upon seeing this the wraith suddenly reached for Waltz with everything she had, wrapping her strips of cloth around his body. Waltz tensed glancing down as she tightened her hold on him. He was lifted high in the sky suddenly, his stomach lurching with the movement. He stared in fear now, straight into the wraiths eyes inches before his own, before tilting his head to the side and seeing the ground many feet below. Graham was running in circles below him,

roaring with frustration, head thrown back to Waltz and the wraith above. But there was nothing he could do to reach them.
Waltz looked back at the wraith's scarred face for an instant, feeling himself tipping back then, still held by the wraith. They both tilted upside-down, plummeting head-first towards the centre of the lake.
Waltz drew a deep gasp just before he hit the surface.
The icy chill of the lake was a shock to him, almost making him swallow water. Waltz struggled to hold his breath, fighting desperately against the binds that held him, reaching for his sword, which slipped from his fingers in his panic. It sunk fast, vanishing quickly into the shadows of the lake and far out of reach.
Waltz knew they were heading deeper into the lake, heading downwards, he could feel the pressure on his eardrums, it was becoming painful, and the water was quickly getting freezing in a matter of mere seconds.
Waltz glanced above him towards the surface of the black waters, the dark lake, seeing faint light of the sun only briefly, before the wraith that held him blocked his view.
Waltz stared back into her green-glowing eyes, unable to hold his breath any longer. He breathed outwards, bubbles rising from his throat towards the surface of the water.
The wraith was calm now, simply holding him.
She was trying to drown him.
Waltz fought to free himself, his lungs beginning to burn.
He felt the water enter his lungs.

He stopped struggling then, becoming still, simply hanging calmly in the water.
The wraith let him go then, the tendrils of her dress drawing away calmly, as she caressed his face, silent now and relaxed. She stared into Waltz's eyes, they were open, unblinking. Waltz was not moving.

There was a sound suddenly in the lake then, a heavy splashing.
The wraith looked around, seeing a figure swimming towards her through the water. The water elemental.
The wraith moved back from Waltz sharply, away again into the darkness of the water.
Spirit reached Waltz then, taking him by the wrist.
He swam upwards, pulling Waltz's dead weight with him, as he headed swiftly back to the surface of the lake.

Spirit broke the surface, lifting Waltz and holding him in both arms. Upon the shore he saw Sumaey and Graham. Sumaey was panicked, hands to her head and face contorted with grief as she watched Spirit drag Waltz closer to the shore.
She let out a cry of despair as Spirit lowered Waltz's body upon the rocky shore, seeing that he was not moving.
Sumaey fell to her knees, letting out a cry of grief.
She pressed her fingers to his throat, leaning over him with her ear hovering over his mouth as she watched his chest.
He was not breathing.

‘Oh my god’ Sumaey cried, grasping her head, tears streaming down her cheeks. ‘God please no please no!’
‘He’s dead’ Spirit spoke calmly, kneeling on his other side, and staring down at Waltz with wide eyes as beside him, Graham was silent.
Spirit tensed then, looking over Sumaey’s shoulder.
Sumaey whipped around, eyes wide and teary as she stared towards the rocks.
‘W-what is that?!’
Spirit returned his attention briefly back towards Waltz, looking into his face. He seemed so peaceful, his eyes relaxed, his pink hair dripping with water, stuck to his forehead.
‘Waltz…..’
Spirit glanced back up towards the thing behind the rocks. There was a light there, something glowing brightly. Spirit narrowed his eyes, tilting his head to the side as he saw a creature step out from behind the rock, a thing he recognised.
‘The cat?’
Sumaey blinked the tears from her eyes, staring in shock at the creepy looking cat as it padded slowly forwards, its body emanating magic.
‘It’s magic?’ Sumaey gasped.
The cat drew closer, but its demeanour was relaxed, it was unthreatening, calm.
It approached Waltz’s side, stepping on his body and sitting on his chest.
The surrounding three watched in confusion and uncertainty, as the cat lowered its head to Waltz’s, leaning closer to him.
Waltz’s body began to glow then, and the cat raised its head sharply, moving off Waltz then.
Spirit looked down at Waltz, as Graham dipped his head towards Waltz.
Sumaey let out a breath, watching Waltz closely, before glancing away and looking towards the strange cat, its skinny naked body, split tail, dark green skin and large black eyes.
But the cat did not look at her, instead continued to stare at Waltz.
Waltz heaved a panicked breath then, rolling onto his side and retching, water spilling from his mouth.
‘You’re alive’ Spirit said flatly as Waltz continued to cough violently, gasping heavy breaths, wheezing as he did.
Beside him Sumaey balled her fists over her heart, crying out in relief.
‘Waltz!’
She fell over his body then, holding him tightly.
‘Thank god you’re alive!’
Waltz’s shoulder continued to tremble, as he drew shuddering breaths, calming now. He let out a groan, turning his head to the side to look up at Sumaey.
‘…Sumaey?’ he rasped.
‘You sound like hell’ she smiled down at him.
‘What happened?’ Waltz groaned.
‘You died’ Spirit told him calmly. ‘You were dead. Your heart had stopped beating, you had stopped breathing. You were dead.’
‘Dead?’ Waltz mumbled weakly.
‘I’ve said it three times now, do I really have to say it again?’
Waltz looked around, seeing Graham standing over him behind.

The white stag moaned quietly, nudging Waltz's shoulder.
'Where is Loxus?'
'Back down the hill' Sumaey replied. 'I'm so glad you're safe.'
'Are you?' Waltz said sounding surprised. 'I thought you were indifferent to me.'
'I am' Sumaey smiled widely then, 'but it doesn't mean I don't like you.'
[**NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**: I love a good love story as long as it's well done, but so often in my opinion, its forced/obvious/boring/rushed – this is not a love story, and Waltz and Sumaey will never be a couple, and there will never be any kind of romance between them ever ever ever. Just thought I'd make that clear ^^ thank you ever so much * w *]
Waltz looked back at Sumaey, giving her a strange look.
'Ha' he breathed, 'thanks…. I guess.'
It was then that he noticed the cat by his side, sitting there and watching him silently.
'What is *that* doing here?'
'I don't know what it is' Sumaey replied, turning to glance down at the cat-like creature that sat beside her, 'but it saved your life I think.'
'It what?'
'It saved your life.' Sumaey looked back at Waltz. 'What's wrong?'
'I remember something' he said narrowing his eyes, brow furrowed in concentration. 'I remember…faces….my old guild…I saw them…...'
He grasped his head then, trying to remember.
'I can't' he sighed, dropping his hands again. 'It's gone.'
'Are you saying to saw the afterlife?'
'I don't know' Waltz mumbled. 'I don't know what I saw. The memory is lost to me...' He paused then. 'Though I don't know if it was the afterlife…...more like limbo……. how do I know that?' he asked himself then. 'Why do I know that?'
He shook his head.
'I guess it doesn't matter…'
'I'm just glad you're alright' Sumaey sighed then with relief.
'I'm not' Spirit spoke flatly.
Waltz stared at him with a surprised expression. He smiled warmly back at the water element then, sighing.
'Still hate me hu?' he said to Spirit.
'Yes I do.'
'Then why did you save me?'
Spirit dipped his head then, glancing to the side. 'You mean a lot to Sumaey' he grumbled.
'Awww?' Waltz said putting his hands over his heart then. 'That's so sweet.'
'Ok you're starting to annoy me now' Sumaey spoke.
'So what's the deal with the cat?' Waltz asked.
'It's a magical creature' Sumaey said folding her arms. 'It saved you.'
'But why?' Waltz mumbled staring at it. 'And are you sure that's what happened?'
'I saw it with my own eyes' Spirit told Waltz, 'and if Graham could speak, he would tell you the same.'
'Is that true?' Waltz said to Graham turning back to the white stag, 'did you really…uh….'
Graham had lifted his leg then, turning back to lick himself and ignoring Waltz completely.

Waltz faced ahead again, hunching his shoulders awkwardly.
'Okaaay?'
He rose to his feet then, staring suspiciously down at the cat.
'I don't trust you' Waltz said narrowing his eyes at the cat. 'You're freaky.'
'Don't deny what happened' Sumaey spoke with irritation now. 'You were dragged into the lake, you felt yourself drown. You died.'
Waltz's hand came to his mouth then, and he frowned.
He was soaked now in the lakes cold water; his body began to shiver violently.
'My sword' Waltz mumbled. 'I've lost my sword, I dropped it in the water when the wraith held me down.'
The surface of the water was disturbed then, and the others suddenly tensed, glancing around, fearing it might be the wraith. But it was not.
From the centre of the lake, lifted an object, flying gracefully through the air towards Waltz and lowering itself very carefully into his open hands.
'No way that's so cool!' Waltz gasped. 'My sword!'
He then glared with suspicion down at the cat again.
'Did you do this?' he asked the cat. 'Can you talk?'
The cat stayed silent, it sat there, staring up at Waltz intently.
'Well you'll still be a freak to me' Waltz said sheathing his sword now. 'Though I promise I won't throw you again. And I won't try to get rid of you. If you are that determined to follow us…. how did you find us anyway….? Oh yeah you can't talk. Never mind.'
He brushed his pink hair out of his face then, continuing to shiver.
'Let's get out of here' he said. 'I want to get away from this lake. I need to think. And I'm cold and wet and hungry…'
The others moved away swiftly, heading back down the hill.
Spirit lingered for a moment longer, staring back towards the lake, before turning and following after the others.

Waltz had a few minor scratches from where the wraith had cut him, and he was incredibly cold, but apart from that, he was pretty ok.
'It really is incredible' Sumaey was saying to him. 'You were dead.'
They were at the healers now, which was nothing but a small room in somebody's house. It was bright and open and warm in here. Waltz sat on the edge of a wooden table, Sumaey and a young female healer in the room with him, the healer was now folding away blankets and putting them neatly away in the cupboard. Spirit was elsewhere, vanishing shortly before they had reached the small village, and Graham and Loxus were outside, playing together as they so often did. When they had reached the bottom of the hill, away from the lake, they had found Loxus to be his old self again. Whatever the wraith had done to him no longer affected him.
'I feel fine now' Waltz was saying. 'I'm still a bit cold though.'
He had been given fresh clothes to wear, they felt strange on him, cream and loose fitting they were, provided by the healers. He would wear these until his own clothes had dried.
'How did it feel?' Sumaey asked him, 'being dead I mean.'
'I told you already' Waltz said. 'I don't remember it.'

‘Is it really true’ the young female healer, ‘is it true that you died?’
Waltz hesitated.
‘I guess’ he shrugged.
Waltz glanced to the side then, tensing slightly as he saw the strange-looking cat sitting behind him upon a cabinet.
‘Why are you staring at me?’ Waltz asked it.
‘Do you think it can understand us?’ Sumaey asked. ‘Why is it following us?’
‘I don’t know’ Waltz mumbled. ‘To both questions’ he added hastily. ‘Hey cat, can you understand us? What do you want?’
The cat said nothing. It did nothing either, just continued to sit there.
‘Do you know us?’ Waltz asked the creature. ‘Have you met us before?’
The cat made no indication of any kind, but continued to whip its split tail back and forth slowly as it had been doing before, leaning forwards with eyes transfixed on Waltz.
Waltz shivered then, grimacing.
‘Freaky’ he uttered.
‘So what will you do now?’ the young healer asked the two.
Waltz and Sumaey exchanged a glance, before looking back at the healer.
‘There is something keeping the wraith here, something it wants to do, something that is stopping it from moving onto the next life’ Waltz said.
‘And you know this?’ the healer said. ‘How can you be sure?’
‘An educated guess’ Waltz shrugged. ‘I’ve dealt with wraiths before, some remain in this world out of malice, because they want to hurt people, because it’s fun for them. You know…. the kind of person who in real life was a like uh…. a robber or something, a mercenary, you know something really horrible. A shady character…*whatever*…’
‘Oh, I see’ the healer replied.
‘But I sense no malice in her…. Anya…that was her name wasn’t it?’
‘Yes’ the healer fumbled.
‘She did try to kill you’ Sumaey told him. ‘And she hurt Loxus.’
‘And we are both fine’ Waltz waved her away.
‘You nearly weren’t.’
‘Anyway’ Waltz sighed, turning away from her, ‘everything will be alright in the end.’
‘You have a plan?’ the healer asked.
‘I don’t know’ Waltz mumbled. ‘I don’t want to fight her, she is not evil, despite what people might think.’ He fell silent then, furrowing his brow, deep in thought. ‘How do I solve this problem?’ he mumbled to himself. ‘How?’
‘Well you’d better hurry up and come to a solution’ Sumaey told him, ‘don’t forget we were only supposed to be passing through here remember? We were originally hunting another creature remember? The terrifying monster?’
Waltz turned to her. ‘Nani?’
‘Here’ Sumaey told him, bringing out a roll of parchment and showing Waltz.
Waltz took the parchment.

Horrifyingly Terrible Monster out on the Prowl!!!

Huge reward for the elimination of a terrible beast that has been causing habitat destruction, crashing our parties by setting the guests on fire, eating out livestock, burning our crops, scaring out pet cats and dogs and generally being a nuisance

A scary bird-like creature that uses its wings to help it walk, has brilliant red feathers that you could not help but admire (if you get close enough to be killed by it) and also breathes fire.
Is the size of a really big horse – like a shire horse

If you can kill this beast and save our lives….we will make it worth your while

(also if you can find our village's lost kitten, you will make a young girl very happy – black and white kitten with a dot on its head)

'Oh yeah!' Waltz gleamed happily. 'Now I remember!'
'Oh, that's great' Sumaey rolled her eyes, taking the parchment back from him. 'We have to find this monster and kill it.'
'One thing at a time my little flower' Waltz winked at her teasingly.
'Call me a flower again and the next thing you will see is the inside of your own skull.' Sumaey smiled at him sweetly. 'Ok?'
'Got it?' Waltz smiled awkwardly back.
Sumaey's expression dropped, and she turned to walk away.
'I'm going to find something to eat.'
'Sumaey.'
She paused then at the door, turning to glance back at him.
'I will do this job, the bird creature I mean' Waltz said, 'but not until this job with the wraith is finished. I hate to leave a job undone.'
'I know' Sumaey smirked back at him. 'I've learned that much about you at least.'
She turned and walked out of the room then, heading outside.
Waltz watched her go, seeing her through the window.

‘Have you known each other long?’ the healer asked Waltz then.
‘Not really. Not long at all but…we’ve had adventures together.’ He turned back to the young healer then with a smile on his face. ‘I have no idea what she is, she fell from the sky you know, like an angel. She landed in the wilderness, and that is when I found her.’
‘Really?’ the healer asked incredulous, her eyes wide was awe.
‘Yes’ Waltz nodded looking away again. ‘I don’t know if she is even human, but then again…. I am not human either…I guess that’s why we get along so well…. both magical beings….’
‘You are not human?’
Waltz looked back at the young healer with a smile upon his face.
‘No’ he said. ‘I am not human.’

Chapter Seven
The Wraiths Closure

‘Hey how’re you doing?!’
The young barmaid glanced up at Waltz timidly, looking about her, before turning back to face him.
‘Hello’ she smiled.
Waltz grinned happily back.
The place they were now was an open bar, the breeze blew gently into the space. It was empty now, and there was no one else about, save for Waltz and the young maid.
Waltz leant further on the table, watching the maid playfully.
‘What can I do for you?’ the young maid asked him.
‘I want to talk to you’ Waltz gleamed.
‘About what?’
‘I want to talk about the wraith.’
The young maid hesitated then, turning and placed the tray she carried on the bar behind her before looking back to him.
‘What do you want to know?’
Waltz tilted his head playfully, his pink hair falling about his face.
‘I…’ he began, ‘want to know more about Anya, that was her name wasn’t it? The wraith?’
‘Yes’ the barmaid replied dipping her head. ‘We…we knew her.’
‘All of you knew her I’m sure’ Waltz said. ‘This is a small village, everyone knows everyone and all that. I’m sure you all knew Anya very well. What was she like in her life?’
The maid hesitated.
‘Go on’ Waltz urged. ‘What was she like?’
‘She was kind’ the lady spoke quietly.
‘I thought as much, from what I have heard’ Waltz said. ‘I think it was a terrible thing that happened to her.’
‘She abandoned her children.’

‘Yes’ Waltz nodded, ‘so I’ve heard.’
He considered the maid then, watching her closely.
‘Tell me more about her, I want to know everything you know.’

A short distance away, Sumaey watched.
‘What is he doing?’ she asked, sitting on the bench in the open space with Spirit by her side.
‘I don’t know’ Spirit replied in a grumble, leaning forwards on his elbows. ‘I’m sure he’s got a plan.’
Sumaey glanced over her shoulder, towards Graham and Loxus now, who continued to play together as they so often did.
‘They are like children’ Sumaey spoke tenderly. ‘I’ve grown quite fond of them.’ She paused then. ‘I’m glad Loxus is alright, Waltz too.’
She looked back at Spirit then, who sat there silently.
Sumaey looked ahead again, watching Waltz as he continued to converse with the maid.
Later that day, when Sumaey was elsewhere, cleaning Loxus’s metallic body, she saw Waltz again. This time he was talking to an old farmer.
A few hours later, when she had sat down to eat, she saw him again, speaking to someone else.
‘What are you doing?’ Sumaey asked with irritation a time later, as she dug into her dessert, having finished her main meal.
Waltz had been crawling around under the table, rushing about the area, looking inside barrels, within the stables, even in the well.
Spirit glanced up as Waltz dashed by again.
‘*Waltz*!’ Sumaey hissed.
He froze suddenly, looking back towards Sumaey and Spirit who sat at the picnic table. Sumaey was eating cheesecake, and Spirit was eating smoked mackerel.
‘I am looking for someone’ Waltz answered flatly.
‘Who?’ Sumaey asked, raising an eyebrow.
‘What was his name again?’ Waltz asked himself.
‘Who?’ Sumaey asked, tiredly now.
‘Um….that man…the one in the tower. You know…the first one we met from this village, the first man we met when we came here. You remember him?’
‘Yes I do.’ She frowned. ‘What do you want with him?’
‘I need him’ Waltz breathed dramatically. ‘He is the answer to this problem.’
‘Why?’ Sumaey asked, lifting her drink.
‘Because….’ Waltz replied teasingly.
Sumaey glanced up at him, seeing Waltz half-turned towards her with a smile upon his face.
‘You really annoy me sometimes you know that?’
Waltz turned fully now towards Sumaey then with a flourishing movement, smiling ever wider.
‘I know how to solve this problem’ he told her boldly, ‘and we can do it without killing the wraith…not that I intended to kill her of course, at least not now anyway.’
‘What do you need?’
‘This person, the young man we saw in the tower when we first came here…’

Sumaey paused.
‘Andrew’ she spoke.
Waltz clicked his fingers triumphantly. ‘That’s it!’
‘And what do you want with him?’
‘I already told you’ Waltz replied, ‘he will solve our problem.’
‘Cryptic today, aren’t you?’
‘I need to find him’ Waltz breathed, ‘I need to find him.’
‘Ok’ Sumaey said dismissively. ‘Enjoy looking for him, I have not seen him since we first met him.’
‘You think he’s hiding from us?’ Waltz voiced, sounding worried now.
‘Hmm’ Sumaey mumbled.
‘It’s ok’ Waltz said without being disheartened, ‘I will find him.’
‘Ok great, and don’t forget’ Sumaey said to him, ‘we need to finish this job, so that we can get onto the next job, the main job we set out to achieve.’
‘Yes indeed.’ Waltz flinched then as the cat leapt up onto the table, the one he had been trying to get rid of all this time. Its skinny tail curling around its body as it turned to stare at Waltz.
Waltz shivered then, turning sharply away.
‘Right’ he said, ‘I guess I’d better keep looking.’
The cat turned from Waltz then, its sharp eyes staring at a specific location.
Spirit raised his head then, watching the creature closely.
‘The cat’ he voiced.
‘What is it?’ Waltz asked the clouds, finding them suddenly incredibly interesting.
‘I think it senses something’ Spirit voiced.
‘It’s a cat’ Waltz said flatly. ‘I don’t care what it thinks.’
‘Why do you hate cats so much?’ Sumaey asked him suddenly.
‘Where do I begin?’ Waltz sighed dramatically. ‘Let’s see…this is why I hate cats:

1. They silently judge you
2. They believe they are in charge
3. They like to climb onto high places so they can look down on you
4. They don’t stay where they belong and are always on the kitchen counter when you're not looking (even though they KNOW they are not allowed to be there)
5. They claw up and chew on and destroy everything in their vicinity
6. They murder innocent birds and mice
7. They torture innocent birds and mice
8. They are possibly the most boring animal ever
9. They do not care for humans at all
10. They are only nice to you when they want something
11. They condescend to you in cat language
12. They answer you back
13. They are creepy and stare at you

He paused at this one, glaring back at the cat that watched him unblinking. Waltz continued speaking.

14. They are sneaky and conniving
15. They don't come when called
16. They pee everywhere
17. They poop everywhere
18. They malt everywhere
19. They cough up disgusting fur balls
20. They like to sit on tables and shelves and knock things off one after another
21. They rub themselves against you because they seem to think you want to smell like them
22. Even cats hate other cats
23. They would happily sit and watch you get die
24. They get in the way

And that' Waltz concluded with satisfaction, 'is why I hate cats.'
Sumaey let out a heavy sigh, looking down at her drink.
'I'll have a cage built for it' Waltz went on, referring to the nameless cat that had followed them for so long. 'A nice…tiny cage. Then it can stop following me around.'

The next day, Waltz had a cage built for it, a nice tiny cage.
'There you go' Waltz said happily, wiping his hands on his trousers after touching the cat to put it in the cage.
The small wooden cage had been sealed, and the cat was trapped in there.
'Now I've gotten that out of the way, I can continue looking for this man Andrew.'

A few hours later.

'I can't find him' Waltz wailed, falling forwards onto the ground by Sumaey's side.
She lay on her back now, leisurely reading a book.
'Given up so easily have you?'
'I tried' Waltz sobbed into his hands, 'I…I tried….'
'Oh stop your whining' Sumaey huffed impatiently.
'You could help me you know…'
'Meh.'
Either side of her now sat Graham and Spirit. Loxus sat behind her, and she leant back against his cool bronze surface.
Waltz let out a gasp then, leaping up and falling back.
'Did you let that out of its cage?!'
'No' Sumaey droned, 'it let itself out.'

Waltz whipped his head around, glancing towards the wooden cage, which was still completely sealed.
'What? How?' he looked back at the cat.
'Magic' Spirit breathed. 'It's not a normal creature.'
'What do you want?' Waltz asked the cat. 'Why are you following us?'
The cat just sat there, staring at Waltz. It had indeed escaped its cage.
'Why do you stare like that?'
The cat didn't move.
'It's almost as if it wants to tell us something' Sumaey said, not looking up from her book. 'It must know things……oooooohhhhh' she said half-heartedly, '*creepy*…'
'Ok forget the cat' Waltz shook his head then. 'I need to find Andrew.'
Sumaey glanced up then as a shadow fell over them.
Waltz squinted up at this figure, the sunlight behind him, it was difficult to make him out.
It was Andrew.
'Hey guys.' He spoke with sadness now.
'….Andrew?' Waltz breathed. 'What are you doing here? I mean…where have you been?'
'Hiding' Andrew replied, 'from you.'
Sumaey glanced up calmly at that, as the creatures Graham and Spirit watched silently, behind her, Loxus still rested on the ground completely still.
'You were hiding from us?' Waltz said. 'Why? Why did you hide, and why did you come now?'
Andrew sighed calmly then.
'I came' he said, 'because I was drawn here.'
'Drawn?' Waltz asked.
'This cat' Andrew said looking down at the strange creature that sat at his feet, 'it spoke to me.'
'It…. *spoke to you*?'
'I heard its voice in my mind' Andrew said. 'She…convinced me….to face my past and my fears….to face my regrets.'
'She?' Waltz spoke weakly.
'I've been running from my past' Andrew said to them, speaking with sincerity, no longer his jolly self. 'It's time to face it. I'm sure you've learned enough from the people' he went on. 'You know who I am don't you. That's why you were looking for me.'
'I know you hate her' Waltz said, 'I know you hate Anya but…. there is something you do not know.'
'And what is that?' Andrew asked flatly.
'I will tell you' Waltz said, 'but I need to have her before me to speak about this, I need to show you this is true. You will find out soon enough. I promise.'
'Fine' Andrew sighed. 'I am ready to go.'
'Now?' Waltz asked hopefully. 'Best get this over with.'
'Yes' Andrew replied sombrely, letting out a heavy sigh. 'I am ready to meet my mother.'
'OMG that was so dramatic' Waltz laughed. 'Oh wait I just ruined it.'

They walked slowly up the hill, towards the place where Waltz had drowned, where Waltz had nearly died, back up the rocky path towards the black lake.
'Ok so we're doing this' Waltz was saying, 'we're going to be doing this, were doing it right now.'
'Are you alright?' Andrew asked him.
Waltz hunched his shoulders, clinging onto Andrew's arm tightly.
'No not really' Waltz mumbled, glancing tentatively about him. 'I um…I'm just keeping an eye out.'
'You know for a warrior you're kinda a coward' Sumaey noted.
'Shut it Sumaey!' Waltz snapped.
Sumaey ignored him.
They continued to walk up the hill, doing so slowly with Waltz and Andrew leading the way (all the while with Waltz hanging onto Andrew's arm) and Sumaey and the others following shortly after.
Sumaey glanced back towards the others as they went, towards Loxus, Graham and Spirit who trailed in a line after her. She looked ahead again.
They were nearly there. Rounding the corner, the black lake came into sight.
The group slowed to a stop at the edge of the lake, forming a line before it and facing towards the centre. Waltz continued to grasp onto Andrew's arm tightly, glancing feverishly about.
They watched silently, all of them, staring ahead.
Waltz leapt then, feeling something touch his leg. He glanced down to see the cat.
Waltz glared at it angrily.
'Stupid creature!'
'Look' Sumaey breathed.
They all glanced around, towards the centre of the lake, where there was movement.
Something rose carefully out of the water, a figure, it was Anya.
Waltz hunched his shoulders, pulling Andrew in front of him and holding him there, hiding behind him.
Andrew glowered back at him in annoyance, before looking ahead again, his expression changing to one of concern.
The wraith appeared calm now, hanging above the water, silent.
Waltz straightened then, looking over Andrew's shoulder, still holding onto him.
'I've got this' he said triumphantly. 'See she's different now.'
'Don't' Sumaey told him, 'it's not over yet.'
The wraith drifted forwards, moving calmly. Andrew's expression darkened to that of hatred.
'Hello' he said to Anya, 'mother.'
The wraith stopped before them now, peaceful and still. The others could see her clearly now, they saw her torn skin, her flesh ripped apart. She may have been beautiful once, now she was something else. Her lower jaw was missing, her tongue hanging from sinuous pieces of flesh.

‘She can’t speak’ Waltz mumbled, seeing this now.
‘I have nothing to say to her’ Andrew glowered.
‘Don’t make her angry’ Sumaey warned.
‘I don’t care’ Andrew hissed, ‘nothing she can do can hurt me more than I’ve already been hurt. She left me and my brother to die when those monsters attacked our village. She ran to save herself.’
‘No’ Waltz shook her head, still standing behind Andrew. ‘Why do you think she would risk her life to save the man she loves then abandon her children?’
‘I don’t pretend to understand her’ Andrew spoke quietly, as the wraith remained before them. She looked sad now.
‘Andrew’ Waltz spoke clearly to him, ‘she’s blind.’
He let the words sink it.
‘She could not see you that day. That day she was attacked by the demons, that day she ran to save her lover, she came home scarred remember? They cut her face, and her eyes. She was blind’ he said. ‘She did not see you and your brother that day she ran away from you.’
Andrew fell into silence then, eyes wide with shock.
‘…What?’
‘I’ve been talking to almost everyone in the village’ Waltz was saying. ‘I’ve learned a lot about Anya, she is not the kind of person to abandon her own children. She would do anything for her family. Isn’t that right?’ Waltz said speaking directly to the wraith now.
She only stared back at him in silence, arms limp by her side.
Waltz glanced her up and down briefly, before stepping out from behind Andrew.
‘I’m not here to hurt you’ Waltz said to the wraith, showing his hands now. ‘Peace?’
The wraith remained unmoved.
‘I take that as a yes’ Waltz mumbled. ‘Listen Andrew’ Waltz said turning to him. ‘The only thing holding your mother to this world, is your hatred of her. She cannot rest in peace until you’ve learned the truth. She wants you to know…. she didn’t abandon you. She ran inside to find you, she didn’t see you and your brother, it was a dark day remember?’
‘I…’ Andrew fumbled, ‘I…’
‘Accept the truth’ Waltz said to him, ‘so your mother can rest in peace.’
Waltz turned towards the wraith then.
‘She never hurt anyone in the village, never. They were scared of her, but she never hurt anyone. The only reason she hurt me, is because I was a threat to her. That’s how she saw it anyway. Isn’t that right?’ he asked the wraith.
The wraith stared at him, and nodded once, bowing her head low.
Waltz let out a sigh, slumping his shoulders.
‘That’s a relief. I don’t have to worry about being drowned again.’
‘She drowned you?’ Andrew asked turning to him.
Waltz straightened, placing his hands upon his hips.
‘Speak to your mother now’ he said to Andrew, ‘forgive her, so she can move on in peace, and see the rest of her family again.’

The wraith was put to rest, and would no longer appear in the little village anymore. Andrew thanked them graciously, he told the other villagers what he and his guild had done for them, and they thanked him in turn.
'Here is your reward' Bekket the head of the village said to them.
'Thank you' Waltz smiled, taking the bag of coins from her.
'We owe you so much' Bekket continued, 'it's because of you that….' She sighed then, simply smiling. 'We thought awful things of Anya' she said, 'thank you for letting us see the truth. It means the world.'
'I want to give you this' Andrew said to them stepping forward, 'as a personal thanks.'
'What is it?' Waltz asked slightly suspicious at the bundle Andrew cradled in his arms. It was the size of a baby.
Andrew glanced down, uncovering it. It was an egg; the shell was speckled blue.
'An egg?' Waltz breathed, blinking.
'It's a magical egg' Andrew explained. 'My father was a fisherman, he…he found this washed up on the shore, it's a special kind of egg, it hatches into whatever you want it to be.'
Waltz eyes glazed over as he stared.
'….a horse?' he breathed.
'You want a horse?' Andrew asked.
'For so long I've wanted a horse' Waltz replied, speaking weakly now, his voice filled with longing.
'Why a horse?' Andrew asked.
'To ride majestically across the land' Waltz said dramatically, 'to…run in slow motion across the beach in the waves with the wind in my awesome pink hair…'
'Okay?' Andrew replied.
'Yeah I know he's a little weird' Sumaey commented, standing there with her arms folded, the other members of the guild behind her watched silently.
'You want a horse to ride?' Andrew said to Waltz.
'Yes I've wanted that, more than anything…' Waltz sighed longingly.
'Why have a horse when you can have something better?' Andrew replied.
'Better like what?'
'Here' Andrew offered the egg to Waltz, who took it in his arms. 'It senses your wishes, and evolves into what you want it to be.'
'That's amazing' Waltz breathed, 'I *have* heard of these before, now that I think about it, though they are not common.'
'It's a small gift for what you have done for me' Andrew smiled. 'You've given me peace of mind…and I have no use for such a thing as an egg.'
'So if I wish for a horse it will become a horse?'
'Yes' Andrew answered. 'But why wish for a horse when you can wish for a dragon?'
Waltz's eyes grew large then, suddenly excited with possibility.

‘My father wanted a sea creature to help him fish’ Andrew explained. ‘But without him around…it would not hatch…it should have hatched by now; this magical creature is kept alive only by desire.’
‘Thank you’ Waltz said, placing the egg carefully in one of the bags that Graham carried. ‘I really appreciate it.’

They left the small village shortly after, the strange little band of beings, this guild. There were six of them, Waltz and Sumaey, Spirit the water elemental, Graham the stag, and Loxus, whatever he was, and last of all, the cat, who had no name. This creature was indeed different, and walked alongside them now, utterly silent and looking ahead. Waltz had accepted it at last, and no long tried to throw it away (literally).
‘Well I think that was a job well done’ Waltz sighed happily, ‘I feel all warm and fuzzy inside.
Sumaey frowned at him as they continued to walk.
‘Now we can move onto our original quest.’
‘Oh yes, that scary fiery bird creature’ Waltz said.
‘That’s the one’ Sumaey nodded.
Waltz paused then, glancing at the others around him. They suddenly stopped too, watching him back.
Waltz said nothing, but just smiled, before turning and continuing to walk.
‘I got a bit of money for that job’ Waltz said, ‘not much but…we could stay at an inn overnight, get some good food and a warm bed.’
‘Why don’t we go home and rest?’ Sumaey suggested.
‘Are you tired already?’ Waltz smirked back at her.
‘No, I just want a nice long bath I can relax in, with really hot water and a little rubber duck.’
‘What is it with women and their hot water?’ Waltz asked the air. ‘No’ he said. ‘Home is too far away. We should get onto this next job.’
‘That man said it would be dangerous’ Sumaey reminded him as they walked along the silent road, the village behind them growing ever smaller.
‘Yes he did’ Waltz nodded. ‘I almost forgot about him. I wonder what vested interest he had in that creature, and why he didn’t want us to pursue it…. what was his name again?’
Sumaey stared ahead as they walked slowly onwards.
‘Lyle’ she said.
‘That’s it’ Waltz snapped his fingers. ‘Yes…. that scheming little trickster. What is he up to?’ he mused to himself.
‘What are you going to do?’ Sumaey asked Waltz.
‘I’m going to kill the beast of course. It’s a nuisance after all.’
Sumaey nodded.
‘I’m glad for the wraith’ she said. ‘I’m glad we could give her a happy ending.’
‘Well’ Waltz slowed to a stop with his hands on his hips, ‘as happy an ending as she could have at that point.’
Sumaey smiled warmly at him, tilting her head.
‘I’m just glad you’re alright’ she said.

‘Yeah’ Waltz nodded. ‘Me too. Though I can’t shake something, I feel I…. there is something I cannot quite remember, something I want to remember, something…. ack’ he shook his head. ‘I just can’t…’
‘Does that bother you?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘Of course.’
‘Well, I know how that feels.’
‘The woman who fell from the sky’ Waltz sighed, ‘what a fairy tale story that is.’
‘Except in the fairy tales its usually a prince or a princess’ Sumaey countered.
‘Well’ Waltz raised his eyebrow knowingly at her then. ‘I don’t know what *you* are, you could be a princess of the sky, or a queen for all anyone knows, but I know one thing that *I* am.’
‘And what is that?’ Sumaey frowned at him, raising an eyebrow.
‘I am a prince’ Waltz replied.
‘Sure you are. Now let’s get going. I’m starting to get hungry.’
‘Why don’t we rest here?’ Waltz suggested. ‘We have food with us, Graham is carrying it, aren’t you boy?!’ he cried happily to the stag.
The stag flicked his long white tail, bowing its head to scratch an itch.
‘No I want a hot meal’ Sumaey insisted.
‘Now who’s acting like a princess?’ Waltz asked.
‘Don’t you start calling me princess’ Sumaey sneered angrily.
‘Actually, I think you would be the most beautiful princess’ Waltz continued regardless. ‘If you dressed like royalty….oh’ he sighed dramatically, ‘I’d love to see you in royal clothes…’
‘Would you like to wear yourself as a hat?’ Sumaey asked him simply.
‘Hey!’ Spirit called out then.
Waltz and Sumaey glanced around towards Spirit, the water elemental.
‘I can feel its heat’ Spirit breathed.
‘Cryptic nonsense never helped anyone’ Waltz sighed, folded his arms.
‘Shush’ Sumaey hissed at him, holding out her hand. ‘I feel something in the air’ she breathed.
‘Oh not you too’ Waltz sighed, ‘if I want cryptic nonsense I would start……what was that?’
‘*Be quiet you idiot!*’ Sumaey hissed rounding on him.
‘It’s the fire creature’ Spirit breathed, eyes wide now. It was very rare that he ever showed fear.
It was at that moment that Graham immediately took off, running down the road as fast as he could.
‘No not our food!’ Waltz cried in despair, casting his hands out.
It was at THAT moment, when they finally saw the really scary beast.
It was wreathed in flame, a giant bird, with massive wings and a scary looking head. It was really loud and screeching and terrible and oh so terrible. Just imagine something terrible (in ~~bird form~~ fiery bird form and you get the picture)
It was colossal, like the size of a shire horse.
It landed beside them, tremors running through the ground as it landed. Sumaey, Waltz and Spirit stumbled back, eyes wide with shock, Loxus did very little, and conveyed no expression, he couldn’t. But it was clear in his movements he was agitated, very agitated.

The great bird turned towards them, leaning forwards on its wings as it moved, a deep noise echoing from its massive chest. It swung its head around, opening its beak.
Waltz's eyes lit up then as he saw fire within its throat, no one had a chance to act, and the beast could easily have killed them, but they were protected.
An invisible force pushed the fire away from them, saving them. Waltz clapped his hands over his ears as the air began to roar loudly, painfully, inside his head.
He opened his eyes then, experiencing mild surprise at still being alive, when he noticed what stood between them at the fiery bird.
'……cat?'
'Magical creature indeed' Sumaey gasped, backing away and lowering her arms as she straightened.
Spirit lunged forwards then, lashing out at the monster, missing it only inches, before it took off.
'Quick we have to catch it!' Waltz cried, 'Graham! Dammit!'
'So that is the creature' Sumaey breathed, running her fingers through her hair. 'I've never frozen like that before.'
'It's gone' Spirit grumbled. 'We'll never catch it in time.'
'I've fought flying beasts before, they are harder to fight because they keep escaping. It's a real pain in the ass, but if we trap it….it must have a nest near here. Come one.' Waltz paused suddenly. 'Do we have an advantage against it with you?' he asked Spirit then.
'Water beats fire' Spirit replied sombrely. 'If it's down to elements alone I can defeat it myself. But it is bigger than me.'
'Then we got this in the bag' Waltz gleamed.
'Did you hear what I just said?' Spirit asked him flatly.
'What did I tell you about being too confident?' Sumaey asked Waltz.
Waltz lowered his eyes to the ground then.
'Come on then….uh….cat.'
The skinny creature lifted itself then, ready to pounce, and as the others ran off, the cat followed.
Loxus stayed behind on the road as the others made their way onwards. It lingered there for a moment, before making its way ahead, searching for Graham. The two were such good friends.

Waltz and the others searched the area for only a short time, keeping their eyes towards the skies, but it was evident very quickly after, that they would not find it again.
'Come on' Sumaey said to Waltz clapping him on the shoulder. 'Let's go to some saucy tavern somewhere and wet our beaks.'
Waltz turned back to her, raising an eyebrow.
'Nani?'
'Come on Spirit' she said back to him.
The water elemental came to her side, he adored her, adored Sumaey as much as he hated Waltz. Though maybe he hated Waltz slightly less nowadays. Slightly.
'Let's rest' Sumaey said, 'we've had enough adventure for today.'

Chapter Eight
The Cat

‘There was a long time ago’ Waltz was saying, ‘back when I lived with my old guild, god it feels like a lifetime ago…’
‘Return to your original point?’ Sumaey suggested, sitting opposite him at the table.
‘Oh, sorry’ Waltz mumbled.
‘I’m sure you miss them’ Sumaey spoke quietly to her lap.
‘The witch thought killing them would be a good punishment for me, because I disobeyed her.’
‘You have not seen her in a while. She’s not summoned you.’
Waltz smiled, changing the subject then.
‘My original point’ he said steepling his fingers. ‘Wait…. oh yes, I remember. A long time ago we fought a griffon in think it was, we used a magical arrow, we stuck it in its body, and as it flew, it left a trail through the sky for us to follow.’
‘Ok’ Sumaey spoke levelly.
‘We can’t do that.’
‘Why not?’
‘Because’ Waltz frowned, ‘that device was very expensive. And it’s not all that easy to find, but I don’t think it matters’ he paused, ‘we don’t need that anyway. This creature is very big, I think we can find it if…. it’s very big’ he mused. ‘Its nest would be easy to find, it would be somewhere high.’
‘Why do you think that?’
‘I would be somewhere rocky.’
‘What makes you think that?’
Waltz glanced up. ‘It….’ He thought. ‘It would be somewhere rocky, an elemental creature like that…. fire….it would burn everything around it, and it would not be near water, birds nest high, it would be in the mountains.’
‘If you say so’ Sumaey said leaning forwards on her elbows.
‘We just need to get somewhere high’ Waltz mumbled distractedly, ‘get a vantage-point.’
‘Mh-hm.’ Sumaey took a drink from her tankard. ‘Maybe if you ask Graham nicely he will let you ride him the whole way.’
Waltz scowled then, turning sharply away.
‘I need a horse’ he huffed moodily, hugging himself. ‘They are so dam expensive.’
‘Get a cheap one.’
‘No I can’t have an old mare or unbroken animal, I need a strong and fit horse for my work, or else it’s not worth the money.’
Sumaey glanced away then at the bar around them.

‘Maybe one day eh?’
‘Maybe’ Waltz grumbled, lifting his drink, ‘….one day…’
The inn around them was mostly empty, a few figures moved around and spoke in mumbles. It was dim inside, and small, but comfortable. The place had a nice atmosphere.
They were alone here, the cat was nowhere to be seen, and Spirit as he so often did, hid from the people, and Graham and Loxus slept in the sun outside, attracting more than a few stares from those who saw them.
‘You’ve got our rooms ready?’ Sumaey asked him. ‘You’ve booked them I mean?’
‘We need a weapon’ Waltz spoke to himself, not listening to Sumaey, ‘something like a lance fired from a contraption. Killing this creature would be easy, setting up the trap correctly would be hard.’ He frowned to himself. ‘I need more money for this, I need to buy tools to build a device, like a great crossbow, or pay someone else to do it. But for that I need money.’
‘Take another job?’ Sumaey suggested. ‘There are some on the billboard over there. Something small.’

A moment later, Sumaey and Waltz stood side by side before the board. Sumaey standing tall with her arms folded, and Waltz slouching, wearing a look of disinterest and boredom.
‘Here’ Sumaey pointed.
Waltz snatched the poster from the board.
About a day later Waltz and Sumaey had brought the evil goblins head to the house of the man that had posted the job and they were paid.
‘It’s not enough’ Sumaey noted, watching Waltz count the coins. ‘We need more.’

A moment later, Sumaey and Waltz stood side by side before the board (again). Sumaey standing tall with her arms folded, and Waltz slouching (again), wearing a look of disinterest and boredom (again).
‘Here’ Sumaey pointed.
Sometime later they found the sunken treasure chest at the bottom of the ocean and fought off the sirens that protected it, with a lot of help from Spirit, the water elemental. Unfortunately, the chest was empty. Someone had gotten there before them. They were paid for the job nonetheless…but….
‘It’s not enough’ Sumaey sighed.

A MOMENT LATER, SUMAEY AND WALTZ STOOD SIDE BY SIDE BEFORE THE BOARD. SUMAEY STANDING TALL WITH HER ARMS FOLDED, AND WALTZ SLOUCHING, WEARING A LOOK OF DISINTEREST AND BOREDOM.

Things continued like this for several days, until Waltz and his guild had completed every easy quest on the board.
'Ok we've got enough' Sumaey told Waltz at last.
'Great. Ok now we need to build a really big crossbow, and find the nest of this creature. How about I find the nest and you find someone to get this massive crossbow…' he said gesturing dramatically, '…built.'
'I don't think Graham would like you to ride him, you're too heavy.'
'You think you can convince him to let you ride him into the mountains?' Waltz mused.
'I'm lighter than you' Sumaey told him. 'And he already agreed to let me ride him. It'll be much easier and faster to travel with him.'
'How did you convince him to let you ride him?'
'With the promise of food.'
'Ok' Waltz said turning away with a frown. 'Maybe you're right. Plus, he's not very comfortable to sit on, his spine…. for a man…. you know….'
'Still dreaming of that mighty stallion you want so badly?'
'Yup' Waltz whimpered, wiping the tears from his eye.
'Ok' Sumaey said turning away from him. 'You get the massive crossbow built, and I will search the mountain around this area, the people of this town say the creature is near here, its visited them before. But the stone homes do not burn.'
'The thatched rooves do' Waltz replied. 'Don't worry, I got this, I will have this built this…. *massive crossbow*…..'
Sumaey stared at him flatly.
'Ok goodbye then' she said turning away. 'See you later.'

It took many days for Sumaey to scout the mountains near this town, the place where Waltz suspected the fiery creature resided, and he had been right. After many days, Sumaey and Graham found what they had been looking for. It was an open area, sheltered by overhanging rock, a place close to the cliffs edge, a good escape.
Sumaey dismounted Graham, staring intently down at the area below, hand out and resting against his pure-white fur.
'It's the nest' Sumaey mumbled to herself, 'Waltz was right.'
Graham turned his head towards her, regarding her silently.
There were carcasses of animals about the place, large animals, cows, horses.
'We should go before it shows up' Sumaey said to Graham, 'get back to Waltz.'
Sumaey ran beside Graham, back down the mountain and to level ground again, jogging across the open space with Graham trotting beside her. She glanced up at the sky more than once, but saw nothing save for songbirds. For this she was grateful.
At last she reached the village.
'Hey you came back' Waltz gleamed as Sumaey and Graham approached, walking side by side. 'What a relief.'
'You've finished the weapon?' Sumaey asked.
'I have indeed' Waltz said triumphantly, running his hand along the wood lovingly. 'I helped with what little I could, carpentry really isn't my forte, but I could do *something* at least.'
'It's pretty big' Sumaey raised an eyebrow.

‘That’s what she said.’
‘I found the nest’ Sumaey told Waltz. ‘You were right, it is in the mountains as you said.’
Waltz tensed slightly, turning to her and straightening. Behind her on a bench, Spirit raised his head. The cat was sitting behind Spirit on the table, Loxus was nowhere to be seen.
‘We’re probably only going to get one chance for this’ Sumaey told Waltz. ‘Once it knows we’re there, we will lose the element of surprise, we lose our advantage, and it could flee.’
‘That is what I was thinking’ Waltz mused to himself. ‘Killing it would be easy. An arrow through the heart…’
‘An arrow?’ Sumaey echoed, lifting one of them, ‘a spear more like…a lance.’
‘It’s a big arrow’ Waltz frowned, watching Sumaey as she examined the weapon, holding it in both hands and fingering the tip lightly. ‘It’s sharp’ Waltz said, ‘despite how powerful this fiery creature is, it has a weak body. It’s just a bird. There is no armour. Its attack strength is high but….’
‘One shot through the chest’ Sumaey mumbled.
‘A job completed.’
‘Hmm’ Sumaey said. ‘How do we get it up the mountain? Its huge. We need a horse to carry it up, Graham couldn’t manage.’
Waltz stared at her blankly, not saying anything.

A few days and jobs later, they had saved up yet more money, enough to rent the large horse they needed to carry the great weapon up the mountains, and a cart also, on which the weapon would be placed on.
Waltz led the way, holding the reins of the stallion limply in his hand as he waited for Sumaey and the others to catch up. Loxus was absent, choosing to stay back at the village, hidden away. [Loxus is fine. He’s just resting. Also, he does not want to travel up the mountain. He is not a fighter, not really]
The small band of misfits travelled slowly up the mountains, walking carefully, and listening intently, for any sign that the beast was coming back, or was nearby. They had not seen it in days. But Waltz assured them it would be back.
‘The nest was still fresh’ he had told them. ‘Fresh carcasses, it’s probably off hunting again, it will be back.’
They reached the spot in the mountains, the cliff edge on one side, the overhanging rock on the other.
‘I can’t believe you found this place’ Waltz said to Sumaey stunned.
‘Perseverance’ Sumaey shrugged. ‘I had to come across it eventually. I wouldn’t give up.’
‘Still’ Waltz said to her, putting his hands on his hips and looking down at area before them, ‘good job.’
‘Do you think its ok here in the rocks’ Sumaey asked. ‘I mean what if it sees us?’
‘Nah’ Waltz waved her away. ‘It will be ok as long as we don’t move. Don’t move. It can’t see us if we don’t move.’
‘Isn’t that a T-Rex?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘I guess’ Waltz shrugged, ‘I mean I think so…they’re sorta similar right?’ he asked Sumaey turning to her.
She frowned at him.

‘So this weapon will be safe here’ she said to him.
‘This is the best place’ Waltz said. ‘When it goes to its nest, we have the best angle to kill it from this point’ he said. ‘It will be quick. It will be over fast. Straight through the ribcage and through its heart.’
Sumaey watched Waltz closely for a moment, before looking away.
‘We may be waiting here a while’ she said to Waltz. ‘Why don’t I take the horse back to the village, and bring us some food, now that we have the weapon here I think it’s best not to leave it, just in case.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled, crouching down behind the rocks, staring transfixed at the sky. ‘It may be a while.’

Hours passed, night fell and still they waited.
They rested in the rocks now, Waltz sitting back against the rocks behind him, and Sumaey sitting beside him, resting her head against his shoulder as they slept peacefully, in bliss.
Graham sat nearby, with the cat (which had no name) curled up beside him, Spirit was elsewhere.
Waltz furrowed his brow, groaning and raising his head.
He blinked wearily, squinting.
The sun was coming, the sky was beginning to slowly brighten.
Waltz sat up then, rising to his feet. Sumaey woke, lifting her head, her eyes still closed and tired.
Waltz stood at the edge of the drop before them, looking over at the open space that was the creature’s nest.
He tilted his head to the sky, narrowing his eyes.
The skies were clear.

Several days passed, and they waited for all that time in the mountains, with nothing to occupy them save for each other’s conversation. It was desperately dull and oh so dreary.
Then at last, after what felt like an eternity of boredom, something happened.
Spirit tensed suddenly, casting his head towards the heavens.
‘It’s coming’ he hissed. ‘I can feel its heat.’
Sumaey and Waltz who had been talking fell quickly silent, staring at Spirit with wide eyes.
Waltz looked around, alert now. The cat was already standing, staring with its massive dark eyes towards a place in the clouds.
Waltz turned over, kneeling low, his body in a crouch as beside him Sumaey readied herself.
They saw it at last, and Waltz could not help but breathe a sigh of relief.
‘At last’ he uttered, shoulders hunched. ‘At last…...’
He crawled slowly over towards the massive crossbow that was pointed towards the nest, quickly working to load the weapon, the great arrow was longer than his body, the tip sharp and precise.

Behind him Sumaey and Spirit crouched lower, hiding behind the rocks and out of view from sight of the creature as it flew steadily closer. Graham had bolted at first opportunity, leaving them alone. The cat however, remained where it stood.
The small group remained utterly silent, utterly still.
Waltz stood behind the weapon, pointing it downwards.
They watched as the fiery creature landed upon the rocks, its colossal size was towering. It lumbered forwards slowly, walking on its wings as it went.
It was peaceful, calm now that it was alone, or so it thought. It was beautiful, its burning red and orange feathers gleaming in the light.
Sumaey and Spirit clung close together, waiting in anticipation. Spirit remained impassive, but Sumaey remained frozen there, eyes wide and forcing herself to breath calm and quietly.
Waltz was about to fire, narrowing his eyes, when his attention drifted upwards then, seeing a figure straight ahead of him on the rocks above the nest, staring at him head on.
Waltz hesitated for a moment in confusion, seeing the figure was human in shape. But even at this distance, it was clearly not human.
The figure screeched then, a high pitched and piercing cry.
The fiery bird rounded suddenly, alert. Waltz panicked and fired, missing the creature by a fraction. He missed its chest, hitting its wing instead.
The creature threw its wing out, breaking the shaft of the great arrow in two, the other end still embedded in its wing.
'*Noooooooo*' Waltz cried in frustration, clawing at the air.
Sumaey and Spirit rose immediately, the cat leapt forwards then towards the fiery bird, bounding down the rocky slope.
Waltz frantically tried to reload the great crossbow, but was grabbed from behind suddenly and pulled sharply back, clawing at the air before him as he tried to reach the weapon.
The figure held his head with both hands, twisting his neck sharply, Waltz realised the creature was trying to break his neck but was stopped by either Sumaey or Spirit. He didn't know, he didn't know what was going on. But he felt suddenly great pain in his neck and spine, a sudden tingling sensation running across his shoulders.
Waltz groaned, forcing himself to his feet, forcing himself to stand again.
He stumbled forwards towards the great weapon, hearing fighting happening behind him, there were sounds he could not identify, but he paid no heed to this, only moved forwards.
But before he could reach the weapon, it exploded suddenly, great splinters of wood flying in all directions.
Waltz fell back, hearing ringing in his ears. His hands and face were cut from the wood, gashes all over his body.
He looked up to a new figure before him and saw a face he recognised.
'…….Lyle?!'
Waltz glanced past Lyle then, to the rocky clearing below, and saw the fiery bird taking wing.
He let out a cry of despair, glaring back up at Lyle who watched the creature as it flew away.
Lyle raised his sword to Waltz, but froze suddenly, beginning to tremble. Waltz glanced down to his side to see the cat approaching, the cat was fixated on Lyle, its body crouched and its eyes never blinking. That was when Waltz felt the air humming, he felt a throbbing in

his head, and as he looked back at Lyle again now, he saw that Lyle was grimacing in pain, glaring back at the cat.
It was doing something to him.
Lyle stumbled forwards then, dropping his sword, blood began to seep from his nose and his eyes began to turn bloodshot red.
He fell to knees, body limp he gasped in agony, '*please no more*.'
Waltz glanced around behind him, seeing the figure he had seen first. He stared in disbelief at what he saw, the creature that Sumaey and Spirit fought with vigour. It was a match for both of them, and moved at lightning speed.
Waltz stared in disbelief as he recognised the figure, not for who it was, but for what it was.
'Chimera?' he breathed.
He looked back towards Lyle then, seeing the cat watching him closely, as rope from the broken weapon weaved through the air, binding themselves around Lyle's body as he knelt there, tying his wrists behind his back. Lyle alarmed tried to resist, but could not. The telekinetic powers of the cat were strong, and as Waltz looked back towards the others, he saw a second cat, identical to the first.
Waltz stared at the others as they fought, unable to think.
The chimera stumbled then, leaping backwards and out of reach.
The creature's hand went to his nose then, he was bleeding, and as he glared back at the second cat at his feet, his body began to shake, and for the second time, Waltz felt the strong humming in the air, reverberating in his head. He was able to get a brief glimpse of the chimera. It was part man part reptile, with the face of a man and black hair, but with a great tail, and dark green scales all over and sharp claws.
The chimera leapt away then, moving at impossible speeds. Before Waltz knew what had happened, it was gone.
The humming in the air stopped suddenly, and Waltz turned back to glance at Lyle, before looking again towards Sumaey and Spirit.
They were both injured and bleeding, but at a glance Waltz could see that they sustained no serious injury.
'Waltz' Sumaey gasped stumbling over to him.
She fell to her knees before him, examining his body carefully. Waltz had been impaled by several shards of wood.
Waltz coughed, spitting up blood.
Sumaey's expression became pained as she stared at him, gritting her teeth.
The cat appeared by their side, there were three of them now, each identical in every way to the other.
Waltz grasped Sumaey hard by the shoulder, throwing his head back and tensing in pain as he let out a wail.
Sumaey watched with alarm as the pieces of wood slowly drew out of his body, fresh blood blossomed from the wound, as Waltz gripped Sumaey painfully, gritting his teeth and groaning. He let out a gasp as the last piece was taken out, falling forwards against Sumaey as she held him in her arms, staring at the cat.
'You're doing this?' she breathed.
There was only one now. The others were gone, but there had only ever been one.

Spirit stepped forwards.
'Is he alright?' the water elemental asked sombrely.
'Gah' Waltz coughed, pushing himself up with a moan, sitting up now. 'I…. oh god that hurts' he tensed then, his breath irregular as he gasped. 'I'll…. I'll be fine, I feel great….no really.'
Sumaey and Spirit exchanged a glance as Waltz continued to hold himself, body hunched over.
Sumaey and Spirit now looked towards Lyle who was tied up and kneeling before them, the cat watched him too. His nosebleed had stopped, but his eyes were still bloodshot red. Whatever the cat had done to him, it had been very effective in subduing him.
'Why are you here?' Sumaey asked him coldly.
Waltz raised his head with a grimace, but didn't attempt to stand, not yet.
'I thought you had gone to seek the wraith' Lyle replied, speaking in a level tone. 'I did not think you would come here to kill this beast.'
'And we did not think we would see you again' Sumaey replied with a frown. 'We completed the quest with the wraith, and all to a happy ending.'
Lyle raised his head.
'Why are you here?' Sumaey asked him. 'Why are you still following us? And what was that creature just now?'
Lyle looked down then, gritting his teeth, a pained expression crossed his face.
'I….' he mumbled. 'I did not think that…. that you would come here.'
'It is our job to protect people' Waltz rasped, still tense from the pain, 'I…. thought you knew that already. That creature is a menace, there are many towns and villages it attacks.' He paused. 'Why do you want to protect it?'
'You wouldn't believe me if I told you' Lyle replied.
Waltz narrowed his eyes at him, he leant forwards then, groaning as he forced himself to stand, bringing his feet under him and rising slowly.
Waltz straightened, clutching at the wounds in his chest and gritting his teeth.
He let out a breath, relaxing slightly, before drawing his sword.
'Tell me' Waltz gasped, 'why…why should I not kill you?'
'You would kill an innocent man?' Lyle asked curiously, glancing up at him.
'Innocent?' Waltz questioned. 'Are you?'
Lyle closed his mouth, saying nothing more.
'You're trying to protect a creature that is hurting people, killing people, destroying their homes and burning their crops. Why? Why would you do that?'
Lyle looked away silently, bowing his head, refusing to speak.
'The creature is important to you' Spirit voiced then, speaking in his sombre tone. 'Why is that?'
'It doesn't matter' Lyle grumbled.
'What about the people dying?' Waltz asked him. 'Does that not matter either?'
Lyle said nothing.
'What was that creature?' Sumaey asked the man. 'The lizard-man.'
'It doesn't matter' Lyle said.
'It was not a lizard-man' Waltz spoke up then. 'It was a chimera.'

Lyle glanced up at Waltz, blinking in surprise.
'How did you know?'
'Yes Waltz' Sumaey asked him. 'How did you know?'
'I have some experience in alchemy and…. *that* sort of thing' Waltz said placing his hands together before him. 'Not that I do any of it myself.' He glanced towards Sumaey who watched him silently. 'My brother is an alchemist' Waltz explained. 'He is also….' he looked back at Lyle, 'a chimera' he finished. 'He is not my brother by blood, he was adopted by my parents who are…interesting people let's say. He was created in a lab, and uses magic to cloak his true appearance. To everyone else he looks human, only those who know him see him for who he truly is.'
Lyle hunched his shoulders, listening to Waltz closely.
'Are you going to kill me then?' Lyle asked Waltz.
'I'm thinking about it.'
The cat walked forwards then, standing between Lyle and the others.
Everyone's attention turned towards the creature then, as a silence suddenly closed in around them. Lyle stared transfixed at the cat, who stared at him intently.
For several seconds nothing happened. Then the cat turned to face Waltz again. It walked over to him, standing up and leaning against Waltz's leg, staring at him silently.
'It's almost as if it's trying to tell you something' Sumaey noted as Waltz began to shift uncomfortably.
'What?' he asked his feet. 'What do you want cat?'
But the cat was unable to speak. It did not have the capability to make any sound.
The cat got off Waltz then, turning back to Lyle.
The ropes that tied him were suddenly cut in many places, falling away from his body.
Lyle was frozen in shock.
'Did you do that cat?' Waltz asked calmly.
The sword suddenly flew from Waltz hand then, causing alarm for everyone as they leapt at the sudden movement. But the sword moved gracefully in the air, turning around and moving slowly back towards Waltz. It slipped back into the sheath at his side, ever so carefully.
Waltz relaxed then, dropping his arms and staring with a confused expression at the cat.
'So strange' Waltz mumbled. 'So you don't want me to kill him? Not even a little?'
'Thank you cat' Lyle said to it gratefully as he rose to his feet, 'thank you, whatever your name is, whoever you are.'

Chapter Nine
A Safe Home

After the incident in the mountains, the guild returned to the town in which they had been staying for the last few weeks. But now, Lyle came with them.
They sat together outside on a bench, beside the inn they spend much of their time now. And it was here, that Lyle was able to meet the other members of Waltz's guild.

‘Hello Graham and Loxus’ Lyle smiled at them.
Loxus stayed a distance away, Graham on the other hand edged forwards, sniffing this newcomer with suspicion, but keeping well out of his reach. Graham drew back after a time, running away back to Loxus’s side. They moved off together, going away and out of sight.
Only the cat which had no name, seemed to be the only one who trusted him.
It sat before Lyle upon the table now, watching him.
Lyle reached out to it, caressing it. The cat bowed its head, closing its eyes as he scratched it behind its ear. The cat began to purr.
‘Such a fascinating creature’ Lyle breathed. ‘You may have saved my life friend’ he said to the cat.
The cat stepped closer to him, rubbing his chest once with its head, before turning and curling up on the table, continuing to purr as Lyle pet him.
‘This creature has some sort of tie to you’ Lyle said. ‘It’s been following you for a long way.’
‘We know’ Waltz said flatly from where he sat opposite Lyle on the bench. ‘It’s been following us for ages.’
‘How do you feel?’ Lyle asked him, glancing up at Waltz.
‘Ok I guess’ Waltz replied sullenly. ‘No thanks to you.’
Waltz sat now only in his boxers, as Sumaey kneeling before him washed the blood away from his body.
‘Ack’ Waltz flinched. ‘It’s cold.’
‘Oh give me a break’ Sumaey snapped, ‘stop being such a baby.’
She rose then, dumping the bloodied cloth into the bowl of water.
‘I’m going to get some fresh water. Back in a minute.’
Waltz watched her walk away. Completely ignoring Lyle. His expression was sour. He was in a particularly bad mood after being injured, and even more so after all their efforts had been in vain.
Spirit the water elemental who sat beside Lyle stared at him silently. Lyle blinked back, beginning to feel a little uncomfortable.
‘Where will you go?’ Spirit asked Lyle, eager to see him go (he didn’t like strangers).
‘I will leave’ Lyle spoke in a mumble, ‘I…. have things I want to…things that need to be done’ he finished.
Spirit continued to watch him.
‘Why do you follow this guild?’ Lyle asked him suddenly.
‘Because I want to’ Spirit answered shortly. ‘That’s all you need to know.’
‘You care for Sumaey greatly’ Lyle said.
‘She saved my life’ Spirit answered.
‘Indeed.’
Lyle turned away from Spirit then, looking towards Waltz now.
‘And what will you do?’ he asked Waltz.
‘You want to know if I will continue this job?’ Waltz replied.
Lyle was silent.
‘I have not abandoned it’ Waltz said turning back to Lyle, facing him at last. ‘But I have nothing I can kill it with now. Thanks to you.’
‘So what will you do?’ Lyle asked him, as he continued to pet the cat.

Waltz narrowed his eyes, turning away then.
'I'm going to visit my brother' he said. 'He lives a long way away. He…. knows about chimeras. They are incredibly rare. If there is one running loose across these lands, there is a good chance he knows more about it.'
'I see' Lyle replied.
'This quest just got a lot more interesting today' Waltz said, speaking as if to himself. 'I wonder what interest you have in saving a monster, and with the appearance of the chimera that seems to want the same…. it's almost as if you work together…...I don't know…...it's just very odd. I *know* there is more to this story, and I'm going to find out what it is.'
Lyle watched him as he spoke, remaining silent.
'I will find out' Waltz said turning back to Lyle at last. 'Though you *could* tell me to save me the trouble.'
'Absolutely not' Lyle droned.
'Fine' Waltz said glancing around, seeing as Sumaey approached him again, carrying fresh water. 'I will find out anyway. Mark my word. I will find out.'
'You probably will' Lyle said rising to his feet. 'Doesn't mean I'm going to make it easy for you.'
'You don't trust guilds?' Waltz asked him.
'You're trying to kill her' Lyle replied.
'Her?' Waltz gleamed then, turning back to him with a sly expression. 'Did you just let something slip?'
Lyle gave Waltz a level expression.
'I wish you luck with your quest' Lyle spoke. 'Goodbye' he said, walking away quickly without another word.
The cat who remained seated on the table watched him passively, its split tail flicking gently back and forth.
'What was that all about?' Sumaey asked as Spirit rose from the bench, wandering off the be alone.
'No idea' Waltz replied. 'But I am…. very interested in him. I doubt this is the last time we will see him. I doubt that very much.'

The chimera walked through the mountains, moving slowly now, hand to his head. There had been a great pain inside him, whatever that cat-like creature had done to him, it had nearly stopped him in his tracks. He fled before he collapsed, as Lyle had collapsed. Now as he walked, the pain was beginning to slowly ebb away.
He straightened up then, lowering his hand from his head and squinting at the horizon.
There were wounds all over his body now, inflicted upon him by Sumaey and the water elemental. He had been a match for both of them, his speed was incredible, but they had still managed to injure him, and blood slowly ran from his wounds.
The chimera looked down, seeing blood dripping down from his leg, there was a deep gash there, in the heat of the moment, he had not noticed it, now it trailed blood.
As he looked behind him, he saw spots of blood he had left upon the rocky ground. He faced forwards again, glancing up towards the horizon once more.

There was a river in the distance, and he made his way towards this place.
He moved swiftly, darting between the rocks and leaping over crevasses. He made his way downwards, reaching the bottom of the mountain in no time at all. He did not pause as he continued onwards, making his way forwards and out into the open, glancing back briefly behind him to make sure he was not being followed, to make sure he was truly alone.
He saw nothing, so faced ahead again, heading towards the river.
It was icy cold, but that did not faze him as he continued onwards through the waist-high water.
He crossed the river, reaching the other side and continuing on, traveling for many miles until he reached a small farmhouse far away. He paused, glancing up at the thatched cottage before him, before starting towards it.
The place was utterly silent now, and there was no one else outside at this time.
He reached the building, climbing up the wall and reaching the first floor, crawling into one of the open windows and into a bedroom, falling forwards onto the floor.
The child that was inside stopped playing suddenly, staring at him as he lay on the floor gasping, a young girl dressed in white, only four years old. She turned and ran from the room then, her footsteps could be heard as she hurried downstairs, calling out to her mother.
'Felix is back!'
The chimera struggled to his feet now, succumbing at last to his exhaustion. He stumbled forwards, collapsing on his front onto the only bed within the room.
A few moments later, the mother rushed into the room, closely followed by her daughter.
'Felix!'
The chimera turned his head to the side, squinting up at the mother. He rolled onto his back then, showing the wounds on his chest. There were flecks of blood on the sheets he lay on.
'What happened?' the mother worried, kneeling beside the bed and grasping his hand firmly in her own.
'There was a guild' Felix replied, speaking weakly.
'Is she still alive?'
'Yes' Felix breathed. 'I saved her.'
The mother stared at his face for a moment, before her eyes travelled down his body.
'Don't move' she said, rising to her feet and rushing out the room, returning moments later with a bowl of clean water and a cloth.
She cleaned his wounds tenderly.
'I think you may need some stitches' she said to him, looking at a particularly nasty gash on his hip, and another on his leg. 'I don't have anything to ease the pain.'
'It's fine' Felix smiled at her. 'I…I'll be ok just…do you must.'
The mother smiled at him weakly, taking his arm first. She worked carefully, sowing the wound closed, Felix grimaced as she did this, but stayed silent.
'Are you alright Tiffany?' he asked the young girl then, as the mother finished stitching the wound on his arm, moving now to the one on his leg.
The young girl nodded silently, standing with her hands behind her back, eyes wide.
'Have you been a good girl?' Felix asked.
She nodded again energetically but said nothing.
The mother glanced back at her daughter then smiling, before looking back at Felix's leg.

‘I’ve cooked a stew’ the mother said.
‘I love your stews’ Felix smiled.
‘When I’m finished would you like to join us to eat?’
‘I would love that’ Felix breathed. ‘I am…. actually very hungry.’
She smiled at him again, before frowning in concentration as lifted the needle.
Felix lay back, sitting quietly as the mother worked, watched by the silent girl. He let out a tired breath, closing his eyes.

Chapter Ten
Home of the Alchemist

It was a few days later, and Waltz and Sumaey were sitting in a fabulous café together.
The journey to Sydney’s home was a long one, Waltz’s brother lived far away.
Waltz and Sumaey sat now at a tiny table, within a very large and wealthy town. It was a beautiful place, rich with life and all sorts of interesting people. Just on their way from the room they stayed at the hotel to this location, they saw several other guilds. Though none were nearly half as interesting as them. They saw many different figures, human and otherwise, but no one had a robot spider-scorpion, or a white stag (that was once human) or a telekinetic creepy looking cat. Even in this town, Loxus had drawn a lot of attention, Graham too, though not so much. Loxus stayed within their hotel room now, resting in a corner utterly still (as if not alive) and Graham, to his great reluctance, stayed in the stables with the horses. It was just Waltz and Sumaey, the cat had wandered off, most likely not far, and Spirit as was expected, had parted from them before they even reached the town. He disliked crowds, and mistrusted everyone except for Sumaey (he even hated Waltz slightly less now, but one could never be sure).
‘Is that nice?’ Sumaey asked Waltz as they sat together in their tiny table outside the restaurant.
‘Oh yes its very nice’ Waltz said continuing to eat. ‘You should try some.’
‘I’ve had enough.’
‘The salmon filled you up?’ Waltz grinned.
‘Yup.’
‘I tell you what though, the food here is delicious. I feel like a king!’
‘Remember it for the future’ Sumaey said to him. ‘We could come back here again one day.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled as he stared down at his plate. ‘That would be nice.’
He ate his dessert now, a spicy breed of cake, dark orange in colour, with delicious chocolate chunks.
‘Oh this is so good’ Waltz moaned in pleasure. ‘This cake is so exotic and exciting. Spicy delicious goodness….mmmmmm.’
‘I’m glad you like it.’

‘They have all sorts of cakes here with all sorts of crazy flavours’ Waltz went on. ‘Melon cake. Spicy almond. Soy sauce and ketchup…mmmm… not as bad as you might think.’
‘You’re starting to sound like a commercial’ Sumaey said to him, leaning back in her chair.
‘I just find this place incredibly fascinating’ Waltz sighed, finishing the last piece of cake and feeling the spice burning his mouth. ‘Ugh so good. This café is partnered with that cake shop we saw isn’t it?’
‘Yeah?’ Sumaey raised an eyebrow.
‘What did that sign say was their special cake of the day?’
Sumaey fell silent in thought before answering.
‘Door mouse.’
‘Ah yes’ Waltz gleamed. ‘Door mouse cake. I will have to try that next time.’
‘You can’t sorry’ Sumaey said to him. ‘We’re leaving today remember? There is still a long way to travel to your brother’s home.’
‘Oh yeah’ Waltz mumbled suddenly dejected. ‘That’s a shame. I don’t know when we will come back through here.’
‘What was your brother’s name again?’ Sumaey asked.
Waltz stared back at her, leaning forwards with his elbows on the table and the fork in his mouth, blinking at Sumaey.
‘His name is Sydney’ Waltz replied.
‘What’s he like?’ Sumaey asked.
Waltz grabbed the fork, taking it out of his mouth then.
‘You don’t know anything about my family do you?’
‘No’ Sumaey replied.
‘Sumaey listen’ Waltz said to her, ‘I knew you agreed to join my guild because I promised to find out who you really were, your past….and where you came from…’ he smiled at Sumaey then. ‘You fell from the sky’ he sighed tiredly. ‘You still don’t remember anything.’
‘No’ Sumaey tilted her head. ‘So tell me about your family.’
Waltz waved the fork before his face hypnotically then, staring at it.
‘You aren’t mad at me for not keeping my promise?’ he asked her.
‘No?’ she said. ‘You’ve given me purpose. And it certainly hasn’t been boring being around. So tell me about your family.’
‘Well. My parents’ he mumbled, ‘live literally hundreds of miles away in another kingdom. My brother is far away but not that far.’
He held the fork still then, looking past it and towards Sumaey.
‘My brother…’ he paused then, ‘he is not my brother by blood but….um…. I always thought of him as my brother. He was adopted by my parents from a very young age, and I always thought of him as my brother, sometimes I forget that we’re not actually related. He is still my brother…but not really.’ ^^
‘That’s cool I guess’ Sumaey mumbled. ‘I don’t know if I have siblings, I don’t even know if I have parents. Hey, maybe I was created in a lab.’
‘That would be interesting’ Waltz laughed. ‘I don’t even know if you are human. Maybe you’re not. I’m not. And maybe neither are you? We can be not human together!’
Sumaey raised her eyebrow at him.
‘Tell me what you really are’ she said to him.

‘That would be spoiling the mystery’ Waltz gleamed, hands splayed on the table as he rose to his feet. ‘Maybe I should keep you guessing’ he smirked.
‘Ok I will think about it.’
‘You’re probably right though’ Waltz said turning away. ‘The sooner we get there…. whatever…I’m sure the fiery bird thing will still be there when we get back. No one else will take that job I’m sure, not with that *Lyle* guy discouraging everyone and taking the job posters down all the time. *What’s his deal?*’ Waltz asked himself. ‘I’m still trying to figure him out….’
‘How do you feel?’ Sumaey asked him standing now. ‘Your injuries.’
‘Still a little uncomfortable’ Waltz admitted. ‘But heroes never give up!’
‘Uh-hu’ Sumaey said turning away. ‘Let’s go find the others’ she said. ‘It’s a long way we’ve still got to go…’

They travelled for many days and many nights, hardly resting.
They left the towns and villages behind them, heading out into a far green county, far from the areas they usually travelled.
‘Its beautiful out here’ Sumaey said at one point, pausing to glance around her as they went. ‘Don’t you think?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz smiled warmly, ‘it is. I love this part of the world, though I rarely get the chance to come here. Its wilder here, and I love the distance.’
‘You don’t often see your brother?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘No. Very rarely.’
‘That’s a shame’ Sumaey replied.
‘Is it?’ Waltz asked her. ‘We’re just living our own lives now. The last time I saw him….’
‘What?’ Sumaey asked.
Waltz frowned.
‘There was a time the witch summoned me for one of her…unpleasant tasks’ he finished. ‘He was there. I think that was before I met you.’
‘Then it must have been some time ago.’
‘I guess it was.’
‘I would be interested to meet your brother.’
‘As he would be interested to meet you’ Waltz countered. ‘Yes, I’m sure you would be very interesting to him. Very interesting indeed. Yes indeedy.’
‘How do you mean?’ Sumaey raised an eyebrow.
‘Maybe he can help you’ Waltz suggested slowing to a stop and glancing over at her. ‘He is an incredible man, very smart and all that. I’m sure…maybe…. he could help you to find out who you are.’
‘Do you think so?’ Sumaey said to him, ‘will I be interesting in the same way as something he wants to dissect?’
‘He’s not going to hurt you’ Waltz scoffed. ‘I promise he is nice.’
‘I’ll take your word on it.’
‘He has never met any of you before’ Waltz said glancing back at his guild around him. ‘Sure, he knows about you, but he has never met any of you. You look nervous Spirit.’

The water elemental bowed his head then, hunching his shoulders slightly and averting his gaze.
'I…. I don't trust him.'
'You've never met him.'
'That's why I don't trust him.'
'And Graham?' Waltz said smiling down at the white stag. 'Are you excited to see my brother?'
Graham simply roared in response, with no other reaction as he continued to walk.
Waltz glanced past Graham then, looking towards the cat as he walked backwards now watching. As he had suspected, it had continued to follow them all this way. As he had suspected.
It walked alongside Graham now, and didn't seem to tire no matter how far they walked. And Loxus of course, never tired of anything.
'He will be very interested in meeting all of us I think' Waltz said, facing ahead again. 'I do think so. And I think all of you will be interested in meeting him. He is after all…very interesting, perhaps more interesting than me, *if* you can believe it. I know it's hard to believe but that is most certainly the truth. He has done many interesting things, as I have done many interesting things, but they are a different sort of interesting, while I go fighting monsters and galivanting about the known world, he does…. that also but he does other things too, behind closed doors! Wait that sounded weird. I mean he does experimental stuff and things and well…amazingly incredible things you couldn't possibly imagine!'
'I can imagine incredible things' Sumaey droned. 'Like you shutting up. Oh waw it's so amazing…'
'If I was forever silenced you would be sad' Waltz told her seriously.
'I'll get over it' Sumaey replied flatly.
'I have not forgotten my promise to you' Waltz said to her, speaking honestly, his tone serious now. 'We will find out one day' Waltz said to her. 'I promise.'
'Thanks Waltz' Sumaey smiled warmly back at him.
She glanced behind them for a moment towards the others that followed. Spirit who was so loyal to her, Loxus and Graham, and the cat which had no name.
They all walked together now across the open countryside.
'What a strange guild we have together' she sighed.
'Yeah' Waltz beamed looking back too. 'I'm rather proud.'
'You should be' Sumaey replied, putting an arm around his shoulder as they walked. 'Think of the things we will achieve in the days from now…it's an exciting thought.' She said. 'Don't you think?'

When they reached their destination at last many days later, Sumaey was quite impressed, she was actually very surprised by what she saw. Waltz had told her that his brother had money, but she was not expecting the small mansion and gardens that surrounded it to be what greeted them.

‘What?’ Waltz shrugged.
‘You told me he had money’ Sumaey frowned at him.
‘Yeah he does’ Waltz said kicking the dirt at their feet, standing with his hands in his pockets.
‘This is more than just *having money*.’
‘I guess’ Waltz grumbled. ‘He’s an alchemist. Well-known and respected in the community. His secret however is that he is actually a chimera. I said already that he uses magic to create the illusion that he is human. He would appear human to you but, I see him for what he is.’ Waltz paused then. ‘He um…. he can also do the same thing I can, but he…can do it at will.’
‘And what can he do?’ Sumaey asked.
‘I told you there is a witch that has control over me’ Waltz said speaking casually as he turned reluctantly to face Sumaey.
‘You did mention something of the sort.’
‘Yes well…’ Waltz mumbled, turning away then. He touched his hand to his heart then, where inside him, was an element, the thing that controlled him, the thing the witch had put inside him. ‘The witch put something inside of me. Something that binds my magic. I can transform into a great creature’ he paused, ‘but only at *her* will.’
‘I don’t think I’ve seen that before.’
Waltz lowered his hand then, swallowing.
‘My brother…Sydney he…he has the same thing, but his is self-inflicted. He can transform into a great sky-beast. Beautiful he is, not like me. He can control his magic at will.’ Waltz straightened suddenly, smiling at Sumaey. ‘Come on then, I’ll show you the gardens. He has quite the zoo.’
‘A zoo?’ Sumaey echoed, turning to follow him as they walked forwards towards the manor.
‘He does many experiments’ Waltz said, ‘he has many interests, but the thing he is most renowned for, is his experiments with chimeras. Chimeras are very rare, there are only a handful roaming free in the known world, the rest are here…’
They walked around the house, meandering around an overgrown path, flowers spilling from the bushes.
‘There are many servants in this place’ Waltz told Sumaey as the others trailed after then, ‘most of them are gardeners. Sydney has always had a fascination with all things that grow.’
Waltz opened the tall iron gate at the side of the house, the archway above was covered in ivy that grew thickly, more brightly coloured flowers grew here, and they were beautiful.
The gate creaked a little as Waltz pulled the gate fully open, holding it for the others, Graham went first, walking confidently, and Spirit after, more tentative now, with the nameless cat following after him. Loxus was last of all, moving carefully along the narrow path.
When they were all through, Waltz closed the gate after them, Sumaey waiting with arms folded as the others walked ahead, spreading out as the path grew wider.
‘What is this place?’ Sumaey breathed in awe as she glanced all around her.
‘I told you’ Waltz grinned. ‘It’s a zoo….kinda….’
All around them were large cages, enclosures, large areas of water held behind decorative walls. The place was stunningly beautiful, with potted plants everywhere, small trees bearing fruit, grapevines growing around frames. It was all crowded together, but amongst the chaos, there was order.

The others split up as they began to explore, the cat leaping up upon a small table, staring silently into one of the smaller cages sitting upon the surface. Sumaey glanced about in wonder at the things and creatures around, even Waltz who had seen these before found interest in them.
'These are all chimera's Waltz explained to Sumaey as they went. 'Each and every one of them was created inside Sydney's workshop.'
Sumaey glanced sideways at Waltz, before looking away again and back towards the cages.
There were so many creatures here that did not exist anywhere else, things few people had ever seen.
In a small paddock nearby, there was a vividly coloured stripped horse, with large ears and a fan-tail, another similar beside it with only patches of stripes, and a mane that pointed stiffly upwards. In another larger pen, there were several peacocks, pure white in colour, but with patches of natural colour, as they should have looked, as if two different peacocks had been sown together, one made from natural colour, the other with its colour washed out. They were beautiful, all of them were. In another enclosure, there was a great and hulking reptile of dark skin, with the head of a cat. In one of the great pools they passed, was a small shark with the head of a crocodile, there were so many things.
A great beast half cat half parrot, a white rabbit with a perfect set of antlers. Another stripped horse with what looked like the head of a fish, its head covered with large fans of skin vividly coloured and beautiful. There was a winged fox with fangs, a creature with the body of a goat and the head of a bird with great wings on its back. In another cage there was something with the body of a rhino and head of a crocodile, a parrot with the head of a crocodile, an owl with the head of a rabbit, a tiny bird with the head of a cat, a bear with the head of a stag, a cat with the head of a rooster, and many more things in cages further on they could not see.
'He made all this?' Sumaey breathed in wonder.
'Yes he did' Waltz sighed, 'the animals he chooses are always tame, easy to manage.'
He petted one of the reptile creatures beside him then, reaching through the bars of the cage to do so. It chattered happily, large teeth shuddering as it whipped its tail, nuzzling into his hand for affection.
Waltz smirked, drawing his hand back then.
'We should go find him' Sumaey suggested.
'No need. He is on his way.'
'How do you know?'
'This garden is the most valuable thing to him, it is watched at all times. He should be here any moment now I should say…'
It was at that time, when Graham suddenly came running back towards them, trotting around Waltz and rubbing his head again him vigorously in agitation.
'What is it Graham' Waltz asked. 'Something's bothered you?'
He looked up then, seeing a familiar figure.
'Hello brother' Waltz grinned.
His brother Sydney took a step forwards.
'Waltz, what are you doing here?'
Beside him, Sumaey stared silently, appearing a little tense.
Sydney turned his eyes onto Sumaey then, studying her intently, his eyes boring into her.

Sumaey narrowed her eyes in turn, tilting her head at him.
Sydney was a tall slender figure, with a curtain of blond hair and piercing eyes.
'It's such a coincidence that you came here' Sydney remarked, turning now back towards Waltz.
'Is it?'
'I wanted to see you' Sydney told him.
'Did you.'
Waltz flicked his pink hair back, straightening then.
'We came here because we need your help' Waltz said to him.
Sydney blinked slowly. 'The chimera.'
'Yes' Waltz said surprised. 'How did you know?'
Sydney dipped his head then, scratching his chin.
'It was very unlikely that you would take that job regarding the fiery bird.'
'How do you know about that?' Waltz asked.
'All these things are tied together' Sydney explained. 'And the reason I wanted to see you.' he frowned then, 'there is a lot I have to tell you. I know who this chimera is. I know…'
He paused suddenly in thought.
'Tell me about your companions. Why do they hide now?'
Waltz raised his head slightly, looking over Sydney's shoulder.
Sydney turned, seeing a blue skinned figure standing behind him.
Spirit drew back suddenly, body hunched over slightly and eyes narrowed with suspicion as he clung to the hedge beside him, as if seeking shelter, as if seeking to hide himself.
'It's ok' Sumaey spoke softly to him. 'Come out.'
Spirit's attention flickered towards Sumaey then, before looking back towards Sydney.
Spirit stepped forwards then, walking around Sydney and coming to stand close to Sumaey. His expression softened as he glanced briefly towards Sumaey, before looking back at Sydney with a firm expression.
'What an interesting….' Sydney mumbled, trailing off. 'Why would you follow Waltz and join his guild?'
'My reasons are my own' Spirit answered shortly.
'I see.' Sydney glanced down at his side then, seeing Graham sniffing his leg.
Graham lifted his head suddenly then, staring up at Sydney with a peculiar expression as he stood close to him.
'Hello' Sydney said to him.
Graham simply stared.
Sydney reached out to him slowly, touching his head. Graham did not move.
'Why does he smell of strawberries?' Sydney voiced then.
'Oh' Waltz said. 'Um…. he used to be human, an apprentice to a powerful magical man. But instead he caused a lot of trouble, so his master turned him into a stag and set his deerhounds on him. He used magic to make his fur smell of a strong scent, easier for the dogs to track him.'
'That's terrible' Sydney said. 'I guess that explains why he has so many scars.'
Sydney raised his head then, drawing his hand back and staring with eyes lowered at the cat that had appeared by his side now.

‘You know most guilds are made up of men’ Sydney said speaking to Waltz.
‘I choose to be a little different’ Waltz answered.
Sydney smirked at this.
‘It’s good to see you again brother’ he said, ‘it has been such a long time.’
‘Likewise.’
‘And’ Sydney spoke slowly, ‘where is the one you call Loxus?’
‘I don’t know’ Waltz replied. ‘That is a good question. Loxus!’ He called out suddenly. ‘Here boy!’
About twenty seconds later, Loxus appeared, stepping carefully around a hedge, the sound of his legs muffled by the grass, until he stepped out onto the gravel.
‘Waw’ Sydney breathed. ‘That is amazing.’
‘Cool right?’ Waltz smirked, folding his arms smugly then. ‘I know I have the coolest guild like *ever*.’
‘I’m almost jealous’ Sydney told him, kneeling before Loxus. ‘Almost.’
He touched Loxus’s cold metallic surface, glancing up to the lantern that hung from its tail curled over its back. He looked back down to its head.
‘I wonder how you see the world’ Sydney mumbled.
‘So you said we were going to be told what was going on?’ Waltz prompted. ‘You know all these things being connected or whatever.’
‘Yes’ Sydney spoke, rising to his feet. ‘Let’s have something to eat together. I will tell you, it’s easier sitting down. We have a lot to discuss.’

The house inside was grand and spacious, the doors painted rich blue and reaching high, almost to the ceiling.
Sumaey slowed to a stop, hearing the footsteps of her companions echoing on the smooth floor as they walked forwards, moving ahead of her as she stopped to gaze around. The windows were large, lighting up the hall, the smooth surface of the floor reflected Sumaey’s profile as she stared through the large window to the grounds outside.
Graham walked past her, his foot sliding from underneath him as he stumbled.
‘Careful Graham’ Sumaey whispered turning back to him.
Ahead of her, Spirit glanced up above them, to the balconies overhead.
‘There is no reason to be suspicious’ Sydney said to the water elemental. ‘Trust Waltz at least if you do not trust me.’
‘I do not trust Waltz’ Spirit mumbled.
‘Gee thanks’ Waltz replied flatly a short distance away.
There was a sudden heavy metallic thud as Loxus slipped, falling on his belly, legs splayed outwards.
‘Careful Loxus’ Waltz hissed urgently. ‘No don’t struggle! You’ll only fall harder.’
There was another thud as Loxus fell again.
‘You know what?’ Waltz said, ‘I’ve just had a thought, why don’t you just wait here?’
Loxus relaxed his body then, legs still and tail hanging low over the ground.
‘There’s a good lad’ Waltz gleamed happily, scratching at his pink hair.
Sydney glanced back at Loxus.

‘Let’s go into the next room’ he said. ‘I can serve you something to eat.’
‘By serve to you mean have servants serve?’ Waltz asked.
‘Got a problem with my servants? I didn’t think so’ Sydney finished hastily without giving Waltz a chance to speak.
‘I just don’t like being served like a cripple’ Waltz replied.
Sydney barked in laugher at that.
‘Are you serious?’ Sydney scoffed, casting Waltz an expression of disbelief. ‘Someone like you?’
‘What does that mean?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Waltz hasn’t told you who he really is’ Sydney noted.
‘Waltz is Waltz’ Sumaey replied as they continued to walk out of the hall and into the next room, Spirit and Graham following. Loxus remained where he had fallen, beside the cat that sat beside his still body now. The mechanical spider-scorpion would wait patiently for their return.
‘No’ Sydney gleamed as they entered the next room through a large archway. ‘Waltz is royalty.’
Sumaey slowed to a stop.
‘Oh he didn’t tell you?’ Sydney smirked at her then. ‘*I’m* not royalty of course, I was adopted into the family…..but Waltz….’ He glanced towards him.
‘Are you going to spill all my secrets?’ Waltz glowered.
‘I didn’t realise it was a secret.’
‘It’s not something I like to openly share.’
‘I guess people would treat you differently if they knew’ Sydney said, walking around the small white table in the centre of the room and pulling out two of the chairs. ‘Tea?’
Waltz walked around and sat down heavily in one of the chairs, Sumaey sat in the other.
Sydney glanced up at Spirit then, pulling out another chair.
‘I’ll stand’ Spirit grumbled.
‘Very well.’ He glanced towards Graham then. ‘I would offer you a chair if I could…’
Graham sat then where he was, body dropping heavily on the ground.
Sydney turned away, glancing towards an open door as a young figure approached carrying a tray of food and tea, a young female servant.
She placed the tray on the table, glancing up at them as she placed before each of them their drinks. There were cakes and sandwiches and biscuits and pieces of cut fruit.
‘Go on’ Sydney urged them. ‘You must be hungry.’
‘Thank you’ Sumaey mumbled, beginning to eat. Waltz was already eating without pause.
Sydney took a small bowl offered to him by the servant before she left, walking over to Graham and placing it before him.
Graham sniffed it tentatively at first, before beginning to eat.
‘Oats’ Sydney explained, straightening again. ‘I thought he would like them.’
‘It’s almost like you knew we were coming’ Sumaey noted, raising an eyebrow.
‘No’ Sydney answered. ‘I just have everything I need here in my home.’
He walked around them then, sitting at the table, casting one last glance over towards Spirit who glared at him, before looking back towards Waltz and Sumaey. Spirit remained standing, keeping a short distance from the table, but staying closest to Sumaey.

‘So you want to know about Waltz’s royal bloodline?’ Sydney offered Sumaey.
Waltz’s attention flickered up towards him.
‘His grandfather is a king’ Sydney told, ‘but you wouldn’t have heard of him. He is not in this kingdom.’
‘If we can change the subject perhaps’ Waltz suggested politely. ‘I don’t like being the centre of attention,’
‘I thought you did’ Sydney turned to him.
‘Not this kind of attention’
‘Fine.’ Sydney let out a tired sigh, returning to the main point. ‘I’m not sure really where to begin. There are a lot of things that are connected, and you have only just come into the picture…. but I needed you anyway.’
‘Let’s start with the fiery bird’ Waltz suggested. ‘Is that not a good place to start?’
Sydney bowed his head then, frowning to himself in thought. Then he glanced up at them.
‘She is human.’
‘Nani?’ Waltz scoffed.
Sydney turned to face him.
‘That fiery creature’ Sydney told him, ‘it is a woman.’
‘Really’ Waltz said flatly. ‘How does that make sense?’
Sydney fell silent then, eyes lowered.
‘Are you willing to help me?’ Sydney asked. ‘I cannot do it without you.’
‘Why is that?’ Waltz asked.
‘Because I need you to…. go undercover’ Sydney replied.
‘Go undercover’ Waltz mumbled flatly.
‘Yes.’
‘And where would I be going? What will I be doing?’ Waltz asked.
Sumaey watched him for a moment, before her attention flickered towards Sydney then.
‘You know how lords and ladies behave, you know how they talk, how they eat…. which order to use cutlery while you eat, how to cut the meat, which drinks go with which meal.’
‘I have a suspicion that you will eventually get to the point’ Waltz said.
‘I need you to meet an important figure, a lord’ Sydney said. ‘Only you can do this, you know how to blend in with these sorts of people… being royalty and all.’
‘Back to the royalty’ Sumaey sighed wearily.
‘Do you not know how to blend in with lords and ladies and highborn?’ Waltz asked his brother. ‘I thought you spent most of your life around these sorts of people, you know…doing your studies with your alchemy or whatever…’
‘I spend most of my time with…intellectuals’ Sydney replied, ‘teachers, scholars, other alchemists, very important folks.’
‘Yeah that’s right’ Waltz nodded, ‘fancy people, you know how they behave and all their political stuff that happens between that sort of people.’
‘True’ Sydney replied. ‘But…’ he turned away then, looking towards Spirit who stood there silently, before glancing back at Waltz. ‘They know who I am, I cannot go undercover, I am well known amongst many many people.’
‘Ok’ Waltz raised his head. ‘You want me to go undercover to speak to some lords and ladies…...? And then what? What do you want me to do?’

‘There is to be a meeting, a secret meeting, you know….bad guys doing bad guy things…’
‘So you want me to take the place of one of the men who is supposed to be at this meeting’ Waltz asked him. ‘And what am I supposed to do?’
‘You are to get a serum’ Sydney told him, ‘a super-secret serum.’
‘And….’ Waltz spoke slowly. ‘What does this serum do?’
‘We don’t know yet’ Sydney replied. ‘But we need it.’
‘Why?’ Waltz asked. ‘If you don’t know what it does? And you’re not telling me the whole picture. What does this have to do with the fiery bird? Who you tell me is actually a woman? Who is ‘*we’*? What the hell is going on?’
‘Ok’ Sydney mumbled. ‘Let me start from the beginning….no that would take too long. It’s very complicated. A lot of stuff has happened, there are many highborn families and…. you now…. there are vendettas, backstabbing, secrets held and truths revealed, you know, political stuff happening between highborn-pureblood families. Complicated stuff happening between rich people. I try to stay out of it all…’
‘By making yourself directly involved’ Waltz added.
‘It was the right thing to do, the uh…. main piece in this story…this lord, they call him the pyromancer. He is an evil man, but…’ Sydney broke off then. ‘He is clever. He knows how to *play the game*. If you will. He is ruthless, but he…is clever. So many people adore him, *because* he is clever, he manipulates people and causes so much harm. I like to keep to myself, keep my mind on my work. But the things that have happened…I cannot ignore.’
‘How very noble of you’ Waltz raised his eyebrow.
‘What does this have to do with the fire bird?’ Sumaey asked.
‘This lord’ Sydney went on. ‘They call him the pyromancer.’
‘Yes you said’ Waltz tilted his head.
They stared at Sydney then.
‘There is a link?’ Sumaey mumbled, ‘between the two.’
Sydney spoke to Sumaey now.
‘The lord’ he told them, ‘he created the fiery bird.’
‘Hmm’ Waltz frowned, ‘fighting families. If this pyromancer lord created this fiery bird…then what is he trying to achieve?’
‘You said the bird was a human’ Sumaey said. ‘The pyromancer turned a human into…this creature?’
‘And why?’
‘To keep her silent’ Sydney replied.
‘Her’ Waltz mumbled. ‘That is what Lyle said’ he turned to Sumaey. ‘Do you remember?’
‘You met Lyle?’ Sydney mumbled.
‘So this pyromancer lord turned this woman into a creature’ Waltz said ignoring his brothers question. ‘But why?’
‘To keep her silence’ Sydney replied. ‘Like I said. There is a lot happening, many secrets, secrets that she has learned.’
‘What makes her so special to the pyromancer?’ Sumaey asked Sydney. ‘Why go through the effort of turning her into this monster?’
‘Because’ Sydney replied, ‘it is his daughter.’
Sumaey tensed slightly.

‘He is a truly evil man’ Sydney said to Sumaey, ‘he went through extra effort and used a lot of magic to do what he did to her.’
‘So what was is it that she learned of him?’ Sumaey asked.
‘We don’t know’ Sydney replied. ‘But we believe it’s something…. very valuable. For a long time, we’ve been trying to corner him, we cannot outright kill him because of…. reasons that would take too long to explain. A lot has been happening, all you need to know’ Sydney told him, ‘is that this lord, this pyromancer is the bad guy, and that he turned his own daughter, his only child, into this monster. She has been this way for so long she has forgotten what she truly is. That is why she burns the buildings around her, the fields. I know she has killed people, but she does not know that. She has forgotten she is human.’
‘And this serum…’ Waltz pressed.
‘We don’t know exactly what it does, but we have our suspicions’ Sydney told them. ‘The pyromancer, he is doing a deal with a merchant, he is going to give him the serum. We don’t know exactly what it does, but we know we don’t want it getting into the wrong hands. That is why we need you’ he said to Waltz. ‘You can play the part.’
‘Won’t he know I am not the merchant?’ Waltz asked.
‘No’ Sydney shook his head. ‘They have never met before, this much is certain.’
‘What will he do if he finds out I am false?’ Waltz asked.
‘I am not going to pretend there are no risks’ Sydney replied.
‘I’ll do it anyway’ Waltz mumbled. ‘I started this quest, I have put so much effort into it already, I want to see it through.’
‘Good’ Sydney nodded approvingly. ‘I am glad.’
‘So we are no longer trying to kill it?’ Sumaey asked.
‘No’ Waltz shook his head. ‘Not knowing now what we do.’
Sumaey turned away.
‘I want to show you something’ Sydney said, rising then and moving away towards an innocuous door set in the corner of the room.
‘We’re going down there?’ Waltz asked, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.
‘Why? What’s down there?’ Sumaey asked him a little nervous now.
‘His…. uh…...experimenting place. Where he does some of his alchemy’ Waltz explained.
‘Only some of it?’ Sumaey said moving away from the table and towards Sydney who waited for them by the door.
‘Some of his darker experiments. Those that are more dangerous, some of his experiments need to be conducted in the dark, he does scary things with demons, shadows, and when he needs a place enclosed, some place that can be contained…. he uses this cellar.’
‘I don’t know if I want to go down there’ Sumaey mumbled as Sydney smirked at Waltz’s words.
‘He’s my brother…. adopted’ Waltz added. ‘I’ve lived with him nearly my entire life. I trust him. Are you saying you don’t trust *me*?’
Sumaey frowned, glancing back at Spirit and Graham. Spirit still lingered in the corner of the room, standing silently, while Graham continued to eat his oats slowly, sitting where he had fallen, happy.

A tiny figure came running into the room then, its pads utterly silent as it ran towards them, the cat, it stopped by Sumaey's feet, facing the closed-door Sydney stood beside. It waited, appearing eager.
'Interesting' Sydney mumbled to himself.
'You can't have it' Waltz said quickly.
'What do you mean?'
'I know you want it' Waltz said to his brother.
'I thought you didn't even like cats' Sydney told him.
'I hate cats' Waltz replied. 'Well…. maybe slightly less, but this one is different.'
'How?'
'You tell me' Waltz smirked.
Sydney frowned at him, amused now.
'Alright then' he relented, reaching for the door and opening it. 'After me.'
Spirit watched nervously as the three human figures descended the steps into the cellar, the cat walking between them. They entered cellar, the door behind them remaining open to give them light.

Sydney led the way, the stairs were steep, as they went, glowing balls of light suddenly ignited within glass balls, hanging from little silver chains from the ceiling.
The four of them reached level ground again, before them was a massive open space, through a great gate that completely separated the stairs from the rest of the cellar.
'I have to be careful' Sydney said to Sumaey, noticing her staring at the iron bars uncertainly. 'I do all sorts here, I don't want…anything escaping, these bars' he touched them, 'they are bound with magic, there is a barrier so that nothing…not even a ghost or phantom can pass through.'
'Yes' Sumaey mumbled, 'I do feel something…'
Sydney gave her a knowing look, turning back to the bars, he brought a single key from his pocket, unlocking the barred door and opening it. It did so utterly silently.
Waltz strode in after Sydney, the cat leapt in after him, Sumaey followed only reluctantly.
Sydney closed the door after them, locking it behind them.
'I'm frightened' Sumaey uttered.
Waltz turned to her in surprise.
'What is wrong?'
'I'm scared…'
'But why?'
'I feel uneasy underground' Sumaey admitted, 'I…. don't like being away from the sky.'
Waltz placed his hand upon her shoulder, gripping her firmly.
'It's ok Sumaey' he told her, 'you're ok, don't you feel safe with me?'
'It's not that…'
'Waltz' Sydney spoke then, 'you saw her fall from the sky didn't you?'
'That's right' Waltz replied. 'She agreed to join my guild on the condition that I find out about her past and help restore her memories, so far I have failed.'
'I think maybe she has some kind of attachment to the sky' Sydney said.
'What do you mean?' Waltz scoffed.

‘In the same way a caged bird does.’ Sydney smirked then. ‘Maybe she is an angel’ he said. ‘I don’t think she is human, just like you are not human’ he said to Waltz.
‘Indeed’ Waltz frowned. ‘So, she is an angel?’
‘Perhaps, perhaps not. In any case’ he spoke to Sumaey then. ‘There is nothing you need to fear, I think your uncertainty comes from a mistrust of me. You think you will not be able to get out of here again.’
Sumaey stared at him.
‘Don’t think about it’ Sydney said gliding past her, ‘and you will be ok.’
Sumaey let out a breath, trying to calm herself.
‘Oh’ she breathed, ‘I think I will be ok.’
Waltz nodded at her, and they made their way forwards.
‘This is a large place’ Sumaey noted, as they made their way through the empty space, as they went, the very air itself seemed to lighten up, though there was no sign of where the light itself was coming from.
‘Does that make you feel better or worse?’ Sydney asked her.
‘I don’t know…’
They came to the end of the open area, walking through an archway and to a smaller area. Here it was like a maze, the path branching off into many areas. It was carpeted here, with pictures on the all here and there, mostly of creatures. It was empty, but comfortable, almost homely.
‘This is where I spend a lot of my time’ Sydney was saying, ‘I have a library in my home, but here I bring a few books sometimes, when I want to be alone or…have certain work to do that is more difficult. I don’t let the servants come down here. Only I come down here, and a few…*privileged* others.’
‘Privileged like who?’ Waltz asked raising an eyebrow.
Sydney smirked at him but did not answer.
They passed through another archway, and to an empty room. There was nothing inside, save for one thing, a man, chained to the wall.
‘Is this what you call privileged?’ Waltz asked slowing to a stop before the man, folding his arms. ‘Relax Sumaey’ he said to her, before looking back at his brother. ‘So who is this?’
‘The merchant’ Sydney replied casually to Waltz, ‘whose place you will be taking.’
Waltz cast a glance over at his brother then, before looking back at the man.
He was about thirty in age, very well dressed, his clothes tailored to fit, he wore expensive rings on his fingers, and jewellery around his neck. He probably once looked fine, though he was dishevelled now, his hair was a mess, he was unshaven and ragged.
He sat back against the wall, his hands chained behind him.
‘Hey’ Sydney spoke loudly to the man. ‘Wake up!’
The man raised his head then, glaring at Sydney in hatred.
‘Comfortable?’ Sydney smirked.
‘It’s not fair to taunt him’ Sumaey told him.
Sydney closed his mouth.
‘So you want me to take this man’s place?’ Waltz asked his brother.
‘Yes.’
‘And…?’ Waltz continued.

‘I learned most of what I know from him’ Sydney replied. ‘He did co-operate *eventually*.’
‘What did you do to him?’ Sumaey asked.
Sydney was quiet for a moment. He continued to stare at the merchant, head turned down and unblinking.
‘Did you torture him?’ Sumaey asked.
Sydney pursed his lips, he raised his head, turning to look at Sumaey. ‘And would that bother you if I did?’
Sumaey raised an eyebrow at that answer.
‘He was…. resistant. But in the end, he told me what I needed to know.’ Sydney smirked again, clearly amused.
‘I didn’t think Waltz’s brother had a cruel side’ Sumaey commented.
‘And how much do you really know about Waltz?’ Sydney said turning to her. ‘How much do you know about each other?’
Sumaey fell quickly silent.
‘I don’t typically enjoy cruelty’ Sydney spoke in a low tone, ‘but this man…’ he trailed off. ‘He….is the worst type of human alive.’
‘What did he do?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Things’ Sydney mumbled, ‘unspeakable things, creative things, that if you were to witness with your own eyes, would scar you for the rest of your days.’ He breathed a slow sigh then. ‘I enjoying doing what I did to him’ Sydney finished. ‘He deserved it.’
‘He’s missing his nails’ Waltz noted.
Sydney’s smile widened.
‘That’s not the only thing he’s missing’ Sydney grinned. ‘I can be creative too. After…. after I learned everything I needed to know, one of the last things I did to him, was that I cut out his tongue, so he could spread no more lies.’
‘What do you plan to do with him now?’ Sumaey asked.
‘He will be very useful to me. He will never leave this cellar.’
‘And?’ Sumaey prompted.
‘I will use him in one of my experiments. I’ve always wanted to create a part-human chimera. I’ve never gotten the chance before.’
‘So you make those creatures yourself?’ Sumaey asked.
‘I sure do.’
‘You make life?’ Sumaey breathed.
‘No’ Sydney answered. ‘I simply work with what I have. I do not create life, I merely…. combine it.’
‘So which of the two creatures you merge is still alive in the end?’ Sumaey asked.
Sydney turned to her. ‘It’s complicated.’
‘And you think Waltz will convince the lords and ladies that he is one of them?’ Sumaey asked, changing the discussion as she turned back to the merchant before them.
‘Yes, for one reason more than anything else.’
Sumaey glanced towards Sydney again.
‘He can dance’ Sydney smirked.
Sumaey gave him a funny look, before glancing over to Waltz who stood there with his arms folded looking smug.

‘I don’t know exactly how long you two have known each other’ Sydney commented, ‘but I know one thing for sure, you are still strangers to each other.’
‘I think you should put him out of his misery’ Sumaey said dismissively then, looking back to the merchant.
‘But why? He deserves to suffer.’
‘You only make yourself a bad person for enjoying it’ Sumaey told him.
The cat stepped forward then, staring at the merchant. The merchant raised his head slightly.
The cat stared up at the man with its large dark eyes, never blinking.
The others fell silent then, staring down at the cat. Sydney unfolded his arms; a strange expression crossed his face as he watched.
Suddenly, the chained man moaned in agony, unable to form words without his tongue, he began to choke, gasping and trembling. He fell forwards suddenly without warning, dead, his eyes wide and empty.
Sydney stared in frozen disbelief. Waltz and Sumaey were equally as stunned.
The cat sat down calmly, still staring at the merchant.
Sydney stepped forward, placing his fingertips upon the man’s neck.
‘No pulse’ he whispered. ‘He’s dead.’
He cast a look at the cat cautiously, rising slowly to his feet.
‘What the hell is that thing….?’
‘You’ve got me’ Waltz mumbled. ‘We’ve never seen it do that before.’
‘What can you tell me about it?’
Waltz frowned in thought.
‘Uh….’ He fumbled. ‘It…. saved my life when I was drowing….at least…. we think it did. It does not speak. It has telekinetic powers. It brought my sword out from the lake when I dropped it. It has followed us a long way, even when I at first tried to get rid of it.’
‘And it has never hurt you, or made you feel threatened?’ Sydney asked.
‘No’ Waltz replied. ‘I mean…not until now anyway. Though I’ve always found it a little creepy looking.’
‘I want to find out more about it’ Sydney told them. ‘With your permission, I’d like to try something.’
‘As long as it doesn’t cause any harm’ Waltz replied stoically.
‘No, it’s perfectly safe’ Sydney answered. ‘I promise. I sense something more to this creature. I don’t feel it is threatening though.’
‘What are you thinking?’ Waltz asked, ignoring the dead body of the merchant who lay at their feet now.
‘I am thinking’ Sydney spoke carefully, ‘that his creature has psychic abilities, and that it wants to help you.’
Sydney turned and walked slowly from the room, Waltz turning back to stare at the cat for a moment, before following him, Sumaey following after Waltz. The cat followed her in turn.
‘Where are you going?’ Waltz asked his brother catching up to him further along the corridor.
‘I want to try something’ Sydney grumbled back.
‘What?’ Waltz chirped.
Sydney raised an eyebrow at him.

‘Don’t worry its completely safe and not complicated at all’ he told Waltz. ‘I just want to test something.’
‘Please refer to my previous question’ Waltz said to his brother.
Sydney groaned, heading back out of the cellar and towards the main house.
They reached the bright rooms again, stepping out of the cellar, Sydney turned and locked the door after them, hiding the key on his person.
‘I want to try something’ Sydney voiced, turned now towards Waltz and Sumaey and the cat, straightening up as he did so. He glanced to the side towards Spirit and Graham who stood on the other side of the room. They hadn’t moved from their positions at all.
Graham appeared to be asleep, calm and relaxed, while Spirit was still tense, glaring at Sydney mistrustfully.
‘I want to try something’ Sydney mumbled again, ‘but I will need all of you. Come with me, I need to go to the other room.’
‘What’s so special about this other room?’ Waltz asked.
‘It has wooden floors’ Sydney replied, ‘I can draw on them with chalk.’
Waltz frowned, tipping his head towards Sumaey before looking back at his brother.
‘I will need Loxus too’ Sydney informed them. ‘Can you help him to come to where I need him to be?’
‘Sure, why not?’ Waltz shrugged.
Sydney nodded his head, moving into the next room, he began to rummage around, Waltz could hear him.
‘Are you going to bring Loxus or what?’ Sydney called out to Waltz when Waltz had not moved.
Waltz whipped around, marching through the room towards where they had left the mechanical spider-scorpion, as Sumaey indicated for Spirit to follow her as she headed after Sydney into the other room. Spirit spoke to Graham briefly as he passed, and the white stag woke abruptly, rising to his feet.
‘Come on Loxus!’ Waltz grinned happily as he stood over the mechanical beast, who rested peacefully on the floor, ‘time to go buddy!’
Waltz grabbed him by the tail, beginning to drag him backwards across the floor, Loxus did not resist.
Step by step Waltz dragged the mechanical creature, until he reached the room where the others waited for him. Here now upon the wooden floor, Loxus was able to stand, and he did so, gathering his legs beneath him and rising slowly.
‘Awww I love you buddy’ Waltz cried, falling to his knees and draping his body over Loxus’s large shining body.
Loxus did not react, save for lifting several of his legs slowly, steadying himself.
‘What’s this?’ Waltz asked, raising his head as he saw what Sydney had drawn upon the wooden floor in chalk.
‘I sense something about this creature’ Sydney told him, ‘this cat.’ It sat obediently at his feet now, flicking its tail. ‘I just want to test something. I believe this cat has more than telekinetic powers, I suspect it may have a mental link with one of you, I think perhaps that’s why it’s been following you so closely. That’s why it was able to find you wherever you went.’
Waltz perked up then excitedly upon hearing this. ‘Really? Mental link? Is it with me?’

‘I doubt it’ Sydney said giving him a flat expression. ‘It’s possible but…. if it were you, you would probably have felt something by now…. something…from her….’ He said looking down at the cat again that sat before him, unmoved. ‘I suspect this creature has a link with either Graham, Loxus or Spirit.’
Spirit’s eyes flickered up at Sydney then, but he remained silent.
Waltz tensed then, hand going to his head, brow furrowed now.
‘I…I do remember something…. when I …came out of the lake….’
‘When the cat first appeared’ Sumaey offered.
‘Yes but….’ Waltz shook his head with frustration then. ‘I can’t remember…’ he sighed. ‘It’s sitting on the edge of my memory…I see faces…. I think I know them but…’ he broke off angrily. ‘It’s no use.’
Sumaey watched him for a moment, before slumping her shoulders.
‘Come on’ Sydney said ushering him over. ‘I want you to stand right there.’
Waltz took a closer look at what his brother had drawn now. It was a series of circles, drawn on the edges of a larger circle, a line from each of these smaller circles drawn to a point in the middle. There were five smaller circles on the outside of the larger one.
‘Hurry up’ Sydney told him, ‘there, right there, stand in *that* circle.’
Waltz moved tentatively over to that location, standing there and waiting with a peculiar expression, Spirit, Sumaey and Graham were already waiting in their own circles.
‘Loxus, you go over to that larger circle’ Sydney instructed him.
Loxus did so, moving over to his place and standing there, all his legs within the circle, he even held his tail within the circle carefully.
‘And you’ Sydney said to the cat, but the cat had already stepped forwards, moving towards the centre of the circle, it sat in the very middle where all the lines which ran from the smaller circles around met.
Sydney smiled at this, more amused than anything else.
He stepped back then, flicking his hand out, the curtains shut around them, casting the room into an unnatural darkness.
Sumaey tilted her head back, eyes alert.
Sydney moved around the others then, staring towards the centre circle at the cat that sat calmly there now (the cat which had no name – that they knew of anyway).
The cat which sat there calmly, suddenly began to glow.
Waltz let out a slow gasp as a purple light emanated from the naked flesh of the small cat.
It grew, a long tendril, reaching towards one of them, towards Loxus.
Waltz’s eyes widened as the light particles surrounded Loxus, making the entire body of the mechanical creature glow.
‘I thought so’ Sydney mumbled. ‘This cat has a mental connection with Loxus.’
‘It does?’ Waltz mumbled in surprise.
‘That’s why it’s been following you for so long’ Sydney explained, ‘no matter how far you travel, where you go…it will always be able to find you…as long as you are with Loxus.’
‘Oh’ Waltz sighed, glancing down at the cat that continued to sit there calmly, staring at nothing. ‘I guess it makes sense now. It first I didn’t want it…I tried to get rid of it, but no matter what I did it would always come back. Now I know why.’
Waltz pursed his lips then.

‘That doesn’t explain why though’ Waltz said. ‘Why does it have an attachment to Loxus?’
‘We might never know’ Sydney grumbled.
‘It saved my life’ Waltz said staring down at the cat. ‘This creature…its special.’
Sumaey smirked then, leaning back and folding her arms.
‘What are the odds of this creature having a connection with Loxus?’ she asked. ‘Of all the members of this guild it could be linked to, it had to be either Loxus of Graham, the only two that cannot speak.’
‘Don’t forget’ Waltz reminded her, ‘this cat is an official member of our guild.’
‘That it is’ Sumaey sighed.
‘So what happens now?’ Spirit asked.
‘You need to travel to this place’ Sydney told them. ‘Waltz, I need you to pose as this merchant and meet this high lord, this pyromancer. I need you to obtain this serum from him, this is very important. We need it.’
‘We?’ Waltz raised an eyebrow.
‘There are several of us working towards a common goal. This pyromancer needs to be stopped, but killing him isn’t enough, people need to know what he has done.’
‘I understand’ Waltz grumbled.
‘You need to go with a partner’ Sydney continued. ‘The pyromancer believes you are coming with your wife, a....an equally dangerous woman. Sumaey would be perfect.’
‘Perfect?’ Waltz echoed, glancing back at her.
‘I will do whatever I need to’ Sumaey replied.
‘Do you have any idea about high-born life?’ Sydney asked her.
‘No.’
‘Then that could be a problem.’
‘Maybe not’ Waltz said, scratching his chin as he turned to regard her. ‘As long as she doesn’t dance’ he said, ‘I could probably teach her the basics along the way. How far is this place?’ he asked his brother.
‘Not far’ Sydney grumbled back.
‘Ugh this is so long’ Waltz moaned dramatically, ‘I can’t wait to get to the bottom of all of this. I thought this mission with the fiery bird was going to be at least relatively easy.’
‘I have been working on this problem for a lot longer than you have’ Sydney told them. ‘I have a lot I want to tell you, but for now why don’t you stay here for the night?’
‘Sounds great’ Waltz accepted swiftly. ‘Where’s my bed?’
‘There is plenty of room for all of you’ Sydney told them. ‘The servants are around, though they are invisible most of the time. If there is anything you need, just ring the bell, there is one in every room.’
‘That’s great’ Waltz said hastily waving him away then. ‘If you don’t mind I would like to wander around this place with my guild.’
‘Sure, whatever’ Sydney replied turning away. ‘I have stuff to do anyway, I’m trusting you not to do anything bad’ he said to Waltz.
‘Of course’ Waltz gleamed back.
‘Just don’t try to enter the locked rooms and you should be fine.’
Sydney walked away then, pausing for a moment to glance back at them, before turning and heading out of the room.

‘Where’s he going?’ Sumaey asked.
‘He’s a busy guy’ Waltz answered dismissively. ‘He’s got a lot of important stuff to do.’
‘You have no idea do you’ Sumaey answered flatly.
‘Nope’ Waltz gleamed in return.
Sumaey looked away.
Waltz moved over towards Graham then, who still wore the bags he had carried along their journey.
He took the egg from one of the bags, staring at it as he held it in both hands.
‘What do you think it will hatch into?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘Who can say?’ Spirit mumbled.
‘Something unspeakably awesome’ Waltz overrode him, gazing at the egg’s shining surface. ‘I can’t wait…’ he breathed.
‘Why don’t you show me the rest of this place?’ Sumaey suggested.
‘Sure’ Waltz said straightening then. ‘Let’s do that.’
Waltz led the others upstairs first, gliding forwards as the others trailed after him. The floor at their feet was smooth and white, the balconies curved and made of white stone. Waltz leant forwards against the balcony, looking over at the open area below.
‘It’s so spacy here’ Sumaey noted, eyes roving around them.
‘My brother has a lot of money’ Waltz replied.
‘Are you jealous?’ Sumaey quickly shot.
‘Of course not’ Waltz said turning back to her. ‘Sydney is a very busy man, he spends a lot of his time though in dark rooms doing his experimental things. He has done incredible things in his life but…...’
‘You like to travel’ Sumaey finished.
Waltz brushed his hair back, running the pink strands through his fingers.
‘I always wanted to see the world’ Waltz murmured. ‘I hated being stuck living in a palace.’
‘You lived in a palace?’ Sumaey raised an eyebrow.
‘No’ Waltz said monotone. ‘I lived with my parents in a simple village. I have been to the palace though. Of my grandfather.’
‘Your grandfather lives in a palace?’
‘When I was born, my parents took me to see my grandfather. I visited my grandfather several times, mostly when I was very young, but I remember him.’
Beside Waltz, Spirit folded his arms, leaning back against the balcony as Graham and Loxus moved past them. The cat leapt up onto the balcony, staring down at the drop below.
‘Maybe’ Spirit grumbled, ‘we will find out what you mean when you constantly refer to being from a royal bloodline…. your grandfather living in a palace….’
‘I will eventually say’ Waltz replied, ‘but I have to drag it out for the sake of the story ^^’
‘Indeed’ Spirit answered flatly.
‘We will each have our own rooms’ Waltz said suddenly changing the subject. ‘It will be very comfortable here.’
‘Don’t you wish you owned a home like this?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘No’ Waltz answered simply. ‘I’m quite happy with our tiny shared home we visited at the start of the book. Though we will rarely visit it, it’s more of a base. If anything terrible happens and we get lost from one another, that is the place to go to meet up again.’

‘I understand’ Sumaey replied.
‘Now let me show you around property’ Waltz winked. ‘My favourite place is the greenhouse’ he said. ‘My brother breeds the most beautiful butterflies that you have ever seen.’
‘So what else is there in the greenhouse?’ Spirit asked unfolding her arms as they moved off again, the cat following them.
‘Etto…’ Waltz thought. ‘Some strange newts, white ones made of living crystal. Some pretty slender fish and uh…...some canaries…...’
The place when they came to it was breath-taking, even for Waltz who had seen the place before. It was a large greenhouse, lush and thick with vegetation, it was like a jungle. The windows were clouded so the outside world could not be seen.
They passed a small waterfall that fell from high above their heads, alongside walkways made of metal painted black.
Sumaey broke into a wide grin, seeing a large butterfly glide past.
‘You’re right’ she said to Waltz, ‘they are beautiful.’
Spirit drifted away towards one of the raised pools, seeing within some pretty slender fish moving gracefully through the water, doing so slowly.
The guild split up as they explored the beautiful garden within this glass case. Waltz came to a table, upon this was a glass bowl, a miniature tree growing from it, and wrapped around the tree there was a large white newt with adorable black eyes.
Waltz leant forwards, pointing his finger towards it. The little newt (which lived in the tree that lived in the glass bowl) shot its tongue out towards Waltz’s finger, sliding the fat tip around his finger before sucking its tongue back in.
‘Still here little fella’ Waltz grinned at it. ‘You’re so cute. If I ever formed roots I would totally get one of you.’
The cat wound around Waltz’s legs then, the way cats do, rubbing its body against him and flicking its split tail from side to side.
‘I would love to see you divide again’ Waltz said to the cat, ‘as you did before. How very curious…’
The cat paused, tilting its head up at him and staring with its massive eyes.
What are you? Waltz thought to himself.
But as it had always done, the cat remained silent.
‘Waltz’ Sumaey voiced. ‘What is out there?’
Waltz turned towards Sumaey, seeing her standing beside a set of glass doors, leaning toward them and squinting to try to see through.
‘Let me show you’ Waltz said moving over to her, ‘the view from that balcony is quite magnificent.’
He reached out and grasped the white handles, opening the doors simultaneously, the strong breeze picked up their hair, and as Waltz stepped forward, he could hear Loxus and Graham’s footfalls moving after him towards the balcony.
This side of the home was not overlooking the garden they had entered when they had first arrived, but instead overlooked open farmland, where there were large fields and orchards, the setting sun cast a beautiful sheet of gold upon everything they saw now.

‘You’re right’ Sumaey sighed as she stood beside Waltz, arms folded. ‘I would hate to be cooped up in this house. I love to travel, I love to see the world.’
‘The world’ Waltz sighed, ‘and all its dangers.’
‘Comes with the job.’ Sumaey answered.
‘Anyway’ Waltz gleamed turning back to the others. ‘If it were not for our adventures, we would not have met these guys.’
Spirit stared back at Waltz with a level expression. Beside him was Loxus and Graham standing close together, and the cat, their newest member of his little guild. She sat now before Loxus staring up at with her large dark eyes, Waltz found these creepy, but not as creepy as he did before.
He smiled, his eyes beginning to shimmer.
‘Are you crying?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘No no’ Waltz fumbled then, quickly rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand. ‘I just have something in my eyes.’
Sumaey smiled back at him, reaching out and placing her arm around his shoulders, pulling him close, resting her head against his gently.
‘I’m sorry I haven’t kept my promise’ Waltz whispered to her, ‘I’m sorry I…. have not found out who you are like I said I would…...I…’
‘It’s ok’ Sumaey mumbled. ‘We have endless time.’

That night, as it began to grow steadily darker, the others went to the rooms they had been given to stay in overnight. Waltz stood in the open doorway of the room Sumaey slept in, seeing her still profile upon the fourposter bed. She lay on her side now asleep with her back to him, resting peacefully.
‘Why are you still awake?’ Waltz voiced then, speaking in a quiet voice.
He turned to the figure that had been lingering in the corridor, seeing the large silhouette and wings of the water elemental.
‘I don’t want to sleep’ Spirit replied.
‘You don’t like it here?’ Waltz asked him.
‘I don’t know this place.’
Waltz watched him for a moment longer, before turning away again and looking back towards Sumaey.
‘You love her don’t you’ Waltz said.
‘She saved my life’ Spirit replied flatly.
‘I love her too’ Waltz replied. ‘And I think she considers me less of a fool now than she did before….’ He glanced back towards Spirit, ‘only slightly though.’
Waltz unfolded his arms.
‘We’re all safe here’ he assured Spirit. ‘Why don’t you go to sleep? If you don’t you will be exhausted.’
Spirit hesitated for a moment, tilting his head to the side, his eyes focused on Sumaey for a time, brow furrowed slightly.
Spirit leant back slightly, turning and walking away. Waltz watched him go.

Waltz thought he was alone then, but then another figure appeared.
‘I thought you would still be awake’ Sydney said to him.
‘Oh?’ Waltz grinned at his brother.
‘You always were restless’ Sydney replied with a grin as he approached him.
Sydney passed him by then, and Waltz followed him.
They walked side by side for a time in silence, moving slowly through the small manor.
It was peaceful within, the corridors empty, the total darkness kept at bay by the light from the moon that shone through the large windows.
Sydney and Waltz stepped out into one of the balconies.
A slow smile spread across Waltz’s face, he raised his head as his pink hair lifted in the breeze.
‘I haven’t seen you in so long’ Sydney voiced then, ‘I was beginning to believe that something had happened to you.’
‘Are you kidding?’ Waltz scoffed. ‘Nothing is going to happen to me. I’m never going to die, I’m too tough……. also, I’m the main character. I can’t die. I protected by plot-armour….’
Sydney gave him a level expression.
‘Have you seen the witch?’
Waltz’s expression slowly changed, becoming serious.
‘No’ he answered, ‘I have not seen the witch in ages.’
‘A good thing I am sure’ Sydney commented, looking towards the stars now.
‘I guess’ Waltz said glumly. ‘I hate to think what she has in store for me when next we meet.’
‘Don’t think about it.’
‘It’s hard not to.’
‘Don’t think about it’ Sydney repeated.
Waltz gritted his teeth, grasping his arms tightly.
‘I just want this to be over’ he hissed. ‘I am tired of doing her work…I have done horrible things….I’ve tortured people….killed children. She is truly evil,’
Sydney stared at his brother silently.
‘It’s my fault I suppose’ Waltz sighed, ‘for being such a fool…’
‘It wasn’t your fault’ Sydney told him quietly. ‘I would have done the same.’
[quick story note: the witch Waltz is bound by once owned and controlled another, a woman Waltz had fallen in love with. He took her place so that she could be free, binding himself to the witch instead and becoming her slave. After this, the woman Waltz had saved, left, never to be seen again]
‘I will never make the same mistake again’ Waltz promised. ‘Not ever.’
He turned to Sydney then.
‘Thanks for helping me on some of my missions’ he said. ‘I know you don’t have to.’
‘I want to.’
‘I know’ Waltz grumbled.
‘We need to keep our minds focused’ Sydney said changing the subject then.
‘Yes’ the Waltz mumbled, ‘the pyromancer.’

‘There is a lot I want to tell you about everything that is going on. I am happy to tell you if you will listen, its somewhat complicated. The important things are what I’ve already told you, but there is more.’
‘I’m not going to sleep anytime soon’ Waltz replied. ‘Tell me everything you know. I want to know everything.’
‘Alright’ Sydney sighed, ‘would you like a drink, it would help against the cold?’
‘Sure.’
They took a seat at the small table at the balcony. A servant approached, she had been waiting in the shadows. Sydney spoke to her briefly before she moved off, returning shortly after with snack foods and drinks for each of them.
‘You stay up late a lot?’ Waltz asked his brother.
‘More so lately’ Sydney spoke softly.
‘Something on your mind?’
‘There is much on my mind.’
Waltz dipped his head.
‘I struggle to sleep nowadays’ Sydney admitted, ‘things have just become…...complicated...’
‘Tell me what I need to know’ Waltz said to him, ‘I want to know everything. Every little detail.’
‘We will be here a while.’
‘It doesn’t matter.’
‘Alright’ Sydney replied, ‘let me think. Where should I begin?’

Chapter Eleven
Peaceful World

The next morning Sumaey woke with the sun, Spirit entered her room, eager to see her.
‘You’re alright’ he sighed.
‘Of course I am’ Sumaey grinned at him, turning towards him with her hand upon her hip.
She had been staring out the window, watching the sunrise higher in the sky.
‘Why wouldn’t I be ok?’ she asked him. ‘I’ve been sleeping in bed.’
It was at that moment that Graham came stomping into the room, stopping before the bed and sniffing it, before jumping on top of it with legs splayed outwards.
‘Graham get off the bed’ Sumaey scolded.
Loxus entered the room then, his metallic legs clicking on the floor. Sumaey turned back towards the bed, seeing the cat jumping onto the bed, walking around Graham who lay on his belly.
‘Where is Waltz?’
‘He’s downstairs’ Spirit replied. ‘Apparently he was awake all night talking with Sydney. He is exhausted.’

When the others went downstairs they found Waltz lying on the sofa fast asleep and hugging himself.
Sydney appeared moments later to greet them. It was clear he had slept little, if at all, there were bags under his eyes, and he squinted at them as he spoke.
'I hope you all slept comfortably' he addressed.
'You didn't' Sumaey answered quickly.
'Is there anything you would like for breakfast?' Sydney asked them.
'Gaaaahhhhhhhhhrrrruuuggggguuuuhhhhh.'
Waltz was slowly waking.
'Do you make an effort to be as loud and annoying as possible?' Sumaey asked, rounding on him with a glare.
'Shuchaface' he answered sitting up and groaning, hand going to his head. 'I want some olives. I'm hungry.'
'That's a strange request' Spirit mumbled under his breath.
'You will all have what you need and be completely satisfied when you leave' Sydney told them.
'Are you getting rid of us?'
'I want you to hurry to this place where you are to meet the pyromancer' Sydney replied. 'I want you to prepare. I have things to do, as do you.'
'I take that as a yes then' Waltz sighed, rising to his feet.
'I phrased it as nicely as possible.'
'Show me a table full of food' Waltz said to him. 'I'm hungry.'
A moment later, they were sitting down at the table (save for Loxus who sat in a corner – Graham stood at the table, and the cat had its own chair)
Waltz stared at the egg he had placed on the table beside him, the large one given to him by Andrew.
'I can't wait to see what's inside' he gleamed excitedly at it, whispering to himself.
'So, tell me about yourself' Sydney said addressing Sumaey now.
'There really is nothing for me to say' Sumaey admitted. 'I fell from the sky with no memories of any past or who I am. The only memories I have are the ones I share with Waltz.' Sydney glanced towards Waltz as she said this, but Waltz was still distracted by his precious egg, continuing to whisper to it. 'He promised me that if I were to join his silly guild' Sumaey continued, 'then he would help me find out who I am. So far, he has failed. But I don't mind' she added casting a glanced over towards him and smiling. 'I rather like this new life…though it can be dull at times. There is an awful lot of travelling that must be done. It often hurts your feet.'
'And what is your relationship with Spirit?' Sydney asked glancing towards the water elemental, who raised his head with an immediate expression of suspicion and distrust. 'This one does not like me I think.'
'He does not like strangers' Sumaey replied considering Spirit who sat beside her. 'I do not know of his past but…I understand that his parents were killed by a guild, and now he trusts no one.'
'He trusts you though' Sydney countered.
'Yes' Sumaey sighed, cutting up her food meticulously. 'He trusts me.'

‘So strange that he feels that way towards guilds yet he is in one himself.’
‘That’s just how things turned out to be’ Sumaey replied flatly.
‘You know most guilds are made up of humans’ Sydney remarked speaking to Waltz now.
‘Yeah well sometimes you have to improvise’ Waltz replied. ‘I actually rather like my guild. They’re interesting.’
‘No doubt about that’ Sydney mumbled. ‘So you still want to become the most powerful guild in the land?’
‘Of course,’ Waltz answered shortly. ‘I want to be the most powerful guild in the whole world!’
‘That is no small feat.’
‘You gotta start somewhere’ Waltz returned.
‘You think you will succeed?’
‘Who knows?’ Waltz shrugged. ‘If I did it would be pretty cool though don’t you think?’
‘Sure’ Sydney frowned. ‘*Real cool*.’
‘So anyway, we should probably get going soon’ Waltz said, rising to his feet then.
‘Aren’t you forgetting something?’ Sydney asked him.
‘Please tell me’ Waltz replied flatly.
‘Sumaey does not know how to dance.’
Waltz glanced over at Sumaey, staring at her until she began to feel uncomfortable.
‘Don’t do that’ she muttered, bowing her head and blushing slightly.
‘Do you know anything of dancing?’ Waltz asked her.
‘No’ she replied sullenly.
‘Wow I’ve never seen you get shy before.’
‘Continue to tease me and I will ram that egg [CENSORED]’

‘Ok so I think we can start the lesson today’ Waltz gleamed happily. ‘Today’s first lesson, will be of learning the basics of dancing the waltz and being super sexy about it.’
‘You’re going to be an awful teacher I just know it’ Sumaey groaned into her hand.
They all stood now in one of the empty halls within the small manor, and a few hours had passed since the verbal abuse from Sumaey to Waltz, and Waltz had finally stopped crying.
Spirit stood like a tower at the edge of the room with his back to the wall, beside him Loxus lay with his belly on the floor (because things were slippery and his feet were going everywhere or whatever) Graham was sitting beside Loxus, and sitting on top of Loxus’s body, was the cat with no name.
At the centre of the room, stood Sumaey, Waltz and Sydney.
‘Do *you* know how to dance’ Sumaey asked Sydney then.
‘Why yes I do’ Sydney grinned happily back. ‘I am actually rather good but…. I’m not as good as Waltz.’
‘If I get the opportunity to dance at this little ball’ Waltz gleamed back at her, ‘then I will show you how awesome I am.’
‘Indeed’ Sumaey replied flatly.
‘Shall we begin?’ Waltz bowed low to her.
‘Can I get you anything before I go?’ Sydney asked them.
‘Nah thanks we’re good’ Waltz waved him away.

‘Ok I’m going to be doing my alchemy-thing’ Sydney told them beginning to walk away. ‘You kids have fun…. if you want me I will be in one of my many offices.’
They watched him go, and then he was gone, away doing a thing in one of his many offices.
‘We’re not staying here long’ Waltz said to Sumaey, ‘I have only a short time to teach you the basics.’
‘Ok?’ Sumaey answered nervously.
‘And you will need a dress.’
‘A dress?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz sighed. ‘You can’t wear what you’re wearing now its uh…. not what would be expected for a lady to wear.’
‘I’m supposed to be a lady?’ Sumaey raised an eyebrow.
‘It’s your disguise’ Waltz gleamed. ‘Right now, you look like what you are. You want to fool them, and be passable as a lady. When we do this, I want you to try NOT to dance, it will be obvious you’re not familiar with the high life, but if you have to, then hopefully I can teach you the basics. Maybe you will be passable at least.’
Sumaey glanced down at herself. She was wearing very high red boots, a red skirt that fell only at the back, and a corset that clung to her figure. She was exposing a lot of flesh. Certainly not a lady.
‘I understand’ she mumbled.
‘Don’t worry’ Waltz raised an eyebrow at her, ‘we will find you a lovely dress.’
‘Trying to dress me up now?’ she scowled, placing a hand on her hip.
‘No?’
He took step close to her, standing inches away. Sumaey glanced uncertainly back.
‘We need to be close’ he spoke slowly, reaching out and taking one of her hands in his own, winding his other hand around her waist. ‘Put your hand on my hip.’
Sumaey did so, feeling a little awkward.
‘Don’t hold your shoulders like that.’
‘What?’
‘Lower your shoulders. Don’t be tense. Act like you know what you’re doing, even if you don’t, then fake it.’
‘Um…. ok?’
‘Are you ready to begin the lesson?’ Waltz said suddenly giving her a kawaii face.
‘……sure’ Sumaey replied flatly.

It was only a few hours later when they left the home, Sydney stood on the steps of the front door watching them go.
Waltz gave a dramatic twirl, waving ridiculously at his brother. Sydney frowned at him, lifting his hand and waving slowly back.
Sumaey glanced back at him as they made their way along the road. Beside her the stag Graham walked slowly, carrying their bags. Loxus moved carefully ahead, and walking close to Sumaey was Spirit. He loved Sumaey very much, he was silent most of the time, but it was clear even to a stranger how much he cared for her.
Waltz twirled again, walking forwards with his hands in his pockets. He pranced beside Sumaey, slowing down then and dropping behind, prancing ahead again ahead of her, doing a

strange dance with his hands in his pockets. He threw his hands up in the air then, swaying his body like a wacky waving inflatable arm flailing tube man.
'Stop it' Sumaey told him flatly, and Waltz immediately ceased.
He walked properly now, bending down and scooping up the cat, hugging it in his arms. It had been walking by his side, trotting to keep up with his pace.
'So you like it now' Sumaey raised an eyebrow.
'Yeah of course I do' Waltz said hugging the cat close to his chest and nuzzling into it. 'It's a member of our team, my bad-ass guild. My unique guild, no other guild out there is like mine…and plus….' He petted the cat then. 'It saved my life.'
Sumaey looked ahead then.
'I mean sure it still looks creepy' Waltz continued, staring at its massive dark eyes, 'but…. it's kinda growing on me…like mould. I think it looks kinda cool now. *Bad-ass.*'
'So, we have a long way to travel' Sumaey sighed wearily. 'Are we sleeping wild, or staying at an inn?'
'I think we will stay outside' Waltz answered. 'I want to travel fast. We have a long way to go.'
'Makes sense.'
They travelled mostly in silence, Waltz carrying the cat most of the way, the cat looked very content in his arms.
'You're not afraid of it?' Sumaey asked Waltz at one point. 'It killed a man.'
'It likes us' Waltz gleamed in response. 'I don't think it would kill us. And if it does…. well at least it will be quick.'
Spirit grimaced then, it was clear he didn't like this talk of death.
It was several hours later when Waltz cried out suddenly, grabbing his head and nearly dropping the cat.
'Oh no!'
'What is it?' Sumaey asked him calmly, completely un-alarmed.
'We talked all night about all sorts but I forgot to ask Sydney about the chimera we met!'
'Too bad' Sumaey grumbled disinterestedly. 'It's getting late, we should find somewhere to stay.'

That night they slept in the cover of the trees, hidden from the rest of the world. They slept peacefully, doing so close to the fire that burned low now. And Waltz, slept hugging the cat to him. He had barely put it down in all that time, but the cat did not seem to mind. It slept soundly in his arms, all of them slept soundly, and for a time, the world was peaceful.

Chapter Twelve
A Pretty Trail through the Air

They travelled a great distance, returning to the area they had been before, one of the places that had been attacked by the great fiery beast. The beast had destroyed many homes, and targeted many places over a wide area, with its nest in the heart of it all. Now there was no sign of it, not here anyway. Not now.
Waltz turned and walked out of the inn they had stopped at, he had headed over to the notice board to see what was there, and the quest for killing the great beast was still going, but there was no page advertising for the job.
'They're saying a man keeps coming in and taking the ad down' Waltz explained to Sumaey as they made their way back through the crowded streets.
It was just the two of them. They found a stable and kept Graham and Loxus there. Spirit and the nameless cat had not entered the town, Spirit as usual had chosen to stay away from other people. So often when they approached a town or village, Spirit would slink away.
'A man hu?' Sumaey said, frowning. 'You think that it's him?'
'Yeah' Waltz sighed. 'Lyle. I'm sure we will run into him again soon.'
'I wonder what link he has to all of this' Sumaey spoke aloud.
Waltz glanced towards her then as they continued walking, before looking ahead again.
'He is….' he began, trailing off then.
'What?' Sumaey prompted.
'The pyromancer was married' he began. 'Then…. something happened, and she went missing, the details are unimportant but certain people speculate that she was killed by the pyromancer. Her son is Lyle, but the pyromancer is not Lyle's father.'
'Could that have something to do with her disappearance?' Sumaey asked.
'Who could say?' Waltz shrugged. 'It may well have something to do with it. The pyromancer knows though Lyle is not his, but he tolerates him anyway, well just about…. apparently.'
'And this creature?' Sumaey prompted. 'It is human….'
'It's his daughter' Waltz finished. 'The pyromancer's daughter…. turned into that….'
'Horrible…' Sumaey mumbled.
'There is one thing I still want' Waltz said lifting a sheet in his hand, one of the ads he had taken from the billboard back at the inn.
'What?' Sumaey's expression darkened at that.
'That's right' Waltz gleamed excitedly at her. 'It's him.'
'The chimera…...wait this ad says he killed a man' Sumaey said taking the page from him and analysing it.
'Yeah' Waltz straightened up. 'It's a tragic thing. This is the first time he has hurt someone…or so it seems.'
'I wonder what changed' Sumaey sighed.
'We're going to find out. I've taken the job.'
'Do we have time for that?' Sumaey asked glancing up at him.
'The meeting with the pyromancer will be in a few weeks from now' Waltz said narrowing his eyes as he stared over her shoulder at nothing in particular. 'We have time' he said. 'I have an idea to catch this chimera. Also' he added meeting Sumaey's eyes at last, his

expression warming now as he focused on her, ‘we need to continue practicing your dancing.’
‘Oh that’ Sumaey glowered. ‘I will never be any good at that.’
‘You don’t have to be good’ Waltz said taking the paper back from her and folding it away, ‘you just need to be passable.’
He linked his arm though hers and they continued to walk.
‘Once this is over, you will never have to dance again’ he spoke teasingly.
‘I can only hope.’
‘And you need a new dress also.’
‘You need new clothes too’ she retorted.
‘Oh don’t you worry’ he said leaning into her. ‘I will look even more fabulous than you.’
Sumaey stared at him in surprise then, before her eyes became gentle.
‘We shall see about that’ she smirked.

The next few days were incredibly busy for Waltz in particular. He wanted to build another giant crossbow to point at the fire-bird to draw the chimera out, but at the same time he wanted to save money. Their funds were running low, and Waltz did everything he could to cut costs wherever possible. So this time instead of paying a fancy man to build this second giant crossbow for him, he did it himself. He purchased an axe and went out into the woods in search of a good tree, Sumaey, Spirit, Graham, Loxus and the cat watching him silently.
He found a good tree and began to chop it up.
Waltz straightened then, wiping his brow. The air around him was humid, the clouds were thick and darkening. A storm was on the way, and short time later, it began to rain.
Spirit let out a sigh then, closing his eyes contented as he tilted his head back.
‘Come on Waltz’ Sumaey prompted. ‘it’s time to come back, you can always carry on tomorrow.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled glumly. ‘I guess you’re right.’

Waltz and Sumaey returned to the room they rented at the inn. By this time, it was dark outside. It had gotten dark very quickly, and Waltz sat upon the window sill now, staring at the world outside with distant eyes.
Sumaey in the room behind him slept soundly in her bed. They shared the same room, but had separate beds.
It was just the two of them. Graham and Loxus rested in the stables on the ground floor. It was a warm night, but nonetheless, when they had last left Graham and Loxus, the two had snuggled close together upon the fresh hay.
Waltz had smiled down at them happily.
Spirit as usual had wandered off the be alone like he so often did, and the cat (which was still as of yet nameless) had slunk off too.
Waltz let out a sigh, resting his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his palm.
He touched his own chest then, thinking about the witch.
He had not been summoned by her for a long time, and he wondered, the next time she did, what would she ask of him.
Waltz lowered his hand, letting it fall to his side.

He thought of the witch often, though these were never pleasant thoughts. She would force him to do horrible things, jobs for her that were both immoral and cruel. But he had no choice but to obey her, the last time he did disobey, she had killed his entire guild of over ten people. All those lives lost in an instant, and all because of him. He had thought more than once of ending his own life, then the witch would have no way to hurt him anymore. But Waltz could not bring himself to do so, not now anyway.
He glanced over towards Sumaey who slept in her own bed, peaceful and relaxed.
'Now I have a reason to live' Waltz spoke quietly to himself. 'Now I have a purpose.'
He turned away then, back towards the nights sky beyond the glass.
'I wonder when she will summon me next…' he whispered.

That morning Waltz woke early. In fact, he hardly slept.
'You look rough' Sumaey noted as they sat together at breakfast.
'It's hard to sleep right now' Waltz groaned dramatically, chasing his boiled egg around in circles on his plate. 'I just got so much on my mind at the moment.'
'Anything I can help with?'
'Nothing you need to worry your pretty little self over' Waltz gleamed merrily.
'So what's happening today?'
'Today' Waltz mused, 'I am going to continue teaching you how to dance.'
'And the massive crossbow you are building again?'
'I am going to continue working on that too' Waltz said.
'You sure are busy at the moment' Sumaey sighed, looking down at her porridge.
'Yeah' Waltz groaned, unable to keep the tiredness from his voice. 'After all this is over, I want to take a really long break, maybe visit a spar and treat myself, get a sexy massage, put some cucumbers on my eyes.'
'That sounds like a lot of pampering' Sumaey frowned sitting back in her seat. 'Sounds very expensive.'
'Maybe we can cut costs by having *you* give me a massage instead.'
'I could give you a massage' Sumaey replied with a cruel grin then. 'But I don't think you will like it. You might come out in the end all black and blue.'
'You're just going to beat me around aren't you?' Waltz raised an eyebrow.
'Yup.'
Waltz sighed dramatically, drooping his head.
'How is your egg?' Sumaey asked him then.
'I think it is doing well' Waltz said perking up then with excitement. 'I am doing everything I can to keep it warm and comfortable. I can't wait for it to hatch. I hope it hatches into something cool like a unicorn! Something I can ride into battle and look majestic on.'
'Mh-hm.'
Sumaey took a sip of her coffee.
'Aw that's good stuff.'
'Meet me outside when you're done' Waltz said to her rising then. 'And we still need to find you a dress.'

‘A dress…I forgot about that.’
‘Don’t worry. You will look fabulous I just know it’ Waltz sparkled at her. ‘Bu-bye now. Don’t eat too many crepes.’
Sumaey stared after him with a bored expression as she watched him go, weaving in and out of the other tables in the dining hall.
Waltz reached the door, beginning to skip then. Sumaey watched him as he danced through the door, heading outside.
She sighed, bowing his head.
‘Silly fool’ Sumaey smiled to herself. ‘It would be so boring without him around.’

After breakfast Sumaey had to wander about the town for some time before she finally found Waltz.
‘What are you doing here?’ she asked him. ‘What are you buying? I thought you would be working on your massive crossbow.’
‘Oh, hey Sumaey’ Waltz replied glancing over his shoulder. ‘You’re finally here, that’s great.’
‘Why are we in the market?’ she asked him.
‘I was just looking for a dress for you, and something for me to wear as well.’
Sumaey stared at him, giving him a flat expression.
‘How are we going to find fancy clothes here?’
Either side of her were suits of armour and weapons on display. An executioner’s sword longer than your body, massive shields and rows and rows of thin needle-like daggers, a morning star and lots of other weird weapons more outlandish in design, staves infused with magic and special gems containing spells.
‘What do you have there?’
Waltz glanced over at her briefly, before turning back to the shopkeeper before him and taking something from him, handing him money before turning back to Sumaey happily.
‘Check this out. Totally cool right?’
‘What is it?’ Sumaey asked flatly staring at the round ball resting upon Waltz’s open palm.
‘It’s a bomb.’
‘Oh sweet lord.’
‘A paralysis bomb’ Waltz finished. ‘I’m going to give it to our little friend.’
‘The chimera. So, you’re not going to hurt him.’
Waltz clutched the bomb firmly in his hand, before putting it away carefully in his pocket.
‘I may have to hurt him a little’ Waltz admitted. ‘If he resists I mean.’
‘So, you want to use the crossbow to draw him out again, by acting like you’re going to kill this fiery-bird. How will you track him once he flees? You know he will. I have never seen anything move so fast before…surely he uses magic…’
Waltz took out another item from his person.
‘This’ he said extending it in his hand for her to see.
It was a tiny little dart. Nothing more.
‘When he runs he will leave a faint trail that he will not be able to see’ Waltz told Sumaey calmly. ‘No matter where he goes, we will be able to find him.’

Shortly after that Waltz continued to work on his massive crossbow, doing what he could to build it quickly. For it was not meant to actually fire, it was only meant to appear real. Something to draw the chimera out. It was only a basic thing, but it still took a lot of work for Waltz.
'Do you need any help?'
'Nah Sumaey I'm fine' Waltz grinned at her. 'You just…. stay at uh…. you know go and look at some dresses or something. I know why don't you send Spirit on a quest or something to get a few extra pennies?'
So that is what she did.
Sumaey left the woodland that grew near the town, heading back into the streets with her head held high, watching the skies above for signs of flame.
The creature they sought had been spotted flying overhead several days ago, there were reports that it had attacked another town some distance away recently, people were seriously injured, some were dead.
Sumaey returned to the streets of the town, finding Spirit who waited for her in the stable where Graham and Loxus had been staying for the nights, the cat (that had no name) was sitting upon the spider's large body, content and staring up at Sumaey with its large eyes.
'Are you willing to take a job?' Sumaey said to Spirit.
'If that is what you want me to do.'
'We could do with some extra money, I'll find you a job at the inn. Do you think you can handle something like that? I will find you something easy.'
'I only have trouble with people' Spirit replied reluctantly. 'But I will try my best.'
'I know you will.'
Spirit dipped his head.
'I will find you something simple' Sumaey told him. 'Come with me.'
Spirit followed her reluctantly as the others stayed behind. It was awkward to move in groups through the narrow streets, and Graham and Loxus would only get in the way. And they knew it. So they chose to be lazy and remain behind.
They entered the inn where the jobs were posted on a billboard, and people moved out of their way as they walked through the room. Spirit was a very tall figure, towering over the others, and he had a very stern presence. No one wished to approach or be near him, and that is how Spirit liked it.
They stopped before the board, standing there for a minute, just staring at it.
'Here you go' Sumaey said, snatching one of the pieces of paper off the board. 'A cat stuck down a well. You love water, right? This is just your thing. You should be quick; the poor thing is probably still down there.'

Spirit returned later that day, having successfully completed his mission.
'How did it go?' Sumaey asked him. 'Did you have fun?'
'I completed the quest' Spirit replied flatly coming to a stop before her. 'Though I doubt you could really call it a quest…...and it wasn't any fun.'
Sumaey smiled at him.

She sat at a small iron table now, a round and pretty coffee table painted white and situated before the stables. Just behind her Graham and Loxus sat in the entrance to their stable, resting soundly.
The sun was just going down now, and the air was beginning to cool. Spirit took one of the seats as the small table, sitting down carefully and leaning slowly back, his wings low down on his body stretching out briefly before folding up again.
Graham raised his head as a figure came towards them from across the courtyard.
'Waltz, you're finally back' Sumaey breathed.
He looked exhausted.
'Yeah' he sighed, slumping in the last remaining seat at the small table. 'I am finally back, and I've finally finished.' He let out another long sigh and a yawn. 'Tomorrow' he said, 'we can take it into the mountains and wait for the chimera. I feel sure it will turn up. It's been hindering everyone who has tried to kill the creature.'
'I wonder why' Sumaey voice aloud.
'I don't know' Waltz mumbled tiredly. 'But I'm going to find out.'
'I found a dress by the way' Sumaey told him, not turning to face him but instead continuing to stare at the sun sinking into the horizon. 'It's back in our room.'
'Would you like another lesson before bed?' Waltz offered.
Sumaey turned to glance at him.
'We still have time' he smiled.
'Aren't you tired?'
'This is important' Waltz said rising to his feet. 'Come on' he beaconed moving towards the centre of the small courtyard. 'Take every opportunity to practice while you can' he told her, 'you need this.'
Sumaey rose to her feet, moving over towards him.
They each held the others hand, their other hand placed on the others hips. They started to dance, moving slowly under Waltz's instructions and lead, as they did this, Spirit watched silently.

Waltz and Sumaey went back to their room shortly after, Waltz collapsed on the bed exhausted, lying on his front and hugging the pillow. Sumaey smiled down at him affectionately. Before getting quickly changing into her nightdress. Waltz did not stir the whole time.
'Waltz?' she nudged him at last, grasping him lightly by the shoulder.
'Mmm?'
She straightened up then, turning towards her own bed. By the time she lay down, Waltz was lying on his front still, she could tell by his breathing, he was fast asleep again.
Sumaey turned away from him, resting on her side and letting out a sigh. She closed her eyes, falling asleep in minutes. She felt so very tired, everything that was happening now was exhausting her, and she worried about going to this ball. But she never spoke of her worries to Waltz. He already had enough on his plate.

The next morning Waltz sat at the breakfast table swaying before his plate.
'Waltz?' Sumaey spoke tentatively. 'Are you ok?'
Waltz fell forwards onto his plate then, face in his beans.
Sumaey watched him mutely for several moments, before Waltz threw his head back then wailing.
'AAAHHH ITS HOT!'
'Keep your voice down' Sumaey hissed.
Waltz picked a napkin and began to wash his face.
'It's ok I feel properly awake now.'
'That's great' Sumaey scowled at him. 'Have you finished the crossbow yet? Is it ready to take into the mountains?'
'Yes yes' Waltz fumbled. 'We can take it to the mountains today, do you know if the bird has been seen in this area recently?'
'I've been asking around' Sumaey replied. 'It has been spotted. It appears that it still nests in the same place, several people have seen it coming back and forth from the mountain.'
'Phew that's a relief' Waltz sighed. 'I was worried for a moment that it had moved on. It would be a real pain to try to find it again.'
'I am really eager to get this job finished at last' Sumaey said to him.
'Yeah I know' Waltz sighed. 'This has been like the longest job like…ever.'
'We will take the crossbow out to the mountains now?'
'Yes' Waltz chimed happily. 'Just let me finish my tea.'

As soon as Waltz had finished his tea, he left the breakfast hall with Sumaey to find the others outside waiting for him. Spirit stood like a column guarding the front of the inn and watching out for them. Loxus was with him, and Graham by his side, as usual the two were together. And the cat that Waltz cherished now, sat upon the back of Loxus, sitting upright and waiting patiently.
Waltz grinned happily at all of them.
'Who fancies a trip into the mountains again?' he asked jovially.
'Let's just go' Spirit sighed wearily. 'I want to get this over with.'
Waltz led them to the small section of woods where he had been working on his massive crossbow. There were large wheels beneath it, but still it was strenuous to push, and it took all of them to drag it into the mountains. All of them helped, even the tiny cat appeared to try to help, pulling the rope tied to the front that Waltz had attached to lead the contraption. Loxus was the only one who did not help, it was awkward for him to do so as he only got in the way, so Waltz has suggested he instead lead the way and keep a look out. Though he would be unable to alert anyone to any danger if he did notice something, as he could not speak.
'I wonder why the cat and Loxus have a mental connection together' Waltz spoke to himself through gritted teeth as he pushed the massive crossbow up the slope.
'What was that Waltz?' Sumaey asked.
'Nothing' he fumbled. 'Just thinking out loud.'
They reached the top of the mountain at last, to the same spot as they had set up before.
'There. Finally.' Waltz gasped. 'Now we can…ugh…….'

‘Wait?’ Sumaey offered. ‘Wait for a very long time.’
A silence passed within the group then, and for several moments no one spoke.
‘Hungry?’ Waltz said to Sumaey suddenly, offering her a squashed sandwich he had gotten out of his pocket.
‘Uh. No thanks.’
Waltz sat heavily on the floor, tearing into his sandwich.
‘You know I never thought we’d be ba-’
Something shot past Waltz then, moving so fast he barely saw it. The massive crossbow was destroyed in an instant in a small explosion, something magic.
Waltz rose to his feet sharply, seeing a glimpse of the chimera before him.
The chimera slowed for an instant, meeting his eyes. The creature moved impossibly fast.
Spirit and Sumaey came at it from two directions. Sumaey managed to burn it with her magic, though the creature did not cry out, and Spirit managed to get a hold of it. But only for a moment. Loxus and Graham immediately ran away as Spirit struck out at the chimera. But the chimera did something so fast that no one saw, one quick move and he slipped out of Spirit’s grasp.
Spirit reached out trying to grab him again, but the chimera was slipping away. He would have escaped had it not been for the cat, who leapt forward, as it had done before. The air suddenly grew heavy, and the chimera slowed, his eyes could be seen clearly, wide with alarm, before flickering down towards the cat.
Waltz took this opportunity to grab the dart from his person, stabbing it into the chimera’s leg.
The chimera shot him a hateful expression, lips curled in a snarl before jumping back out of their reach.
The weight in the air lifted then, and in a heartbeat, the chimera was gone.
‘Success!’ Waltz cried triumphantly. ‘We did it! Good job team!’ <3
‘It was so fast’ Sumaey gasped. ‘Are you alright Spirit?’ she asked rounding on him.
‘I’m fine’ he spoke quietly back, hugging his arm to his chest where the chimera had cut him. ‘It’s just a scratch.’
‘We succeeded’ Waltz continued, ‘and it’s all thanks to you’ he said picking up the cat and hugging it. ‘I know you did something. Thanks buddy!’ ^^
The cat began to purr, gazing at its surroundings contentedly.
‘So, we follow it?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Yeah’ Waltz said as Loxus and Graham slowly returned to their side after coming out from behind the rock they had been hiding. ‘I can see his trail in the air. Can you?’
‘Yeah’ Sumaey breathed. ‘I can see it too…’
‘We’d better get a move on’ Waltz hastened moving forwards. ‘The trail does not last for long, if we linger the wind will blow away the magic!’
They tore forwards then, moving swiftly through the mountains with Waltz leading the way. They came to a trail that dipped downwards, the slope was steep, Loxus especially struggled to make his way down.
‘Easy buddy’ Waltz said, grabbing the scorpion-tail as Loxus’s large body slid down the slope. ‘I got you.’

The nameless cat sailed past them, moving with all grace, her footsteps light. It paused then atop a rock, turning and sitting as it stared back at Waltz and the others.
Graham stumbled past then as Waltz with great effort, helped Loxus back to some form of stability.
'There you go pal' Waltz said patting Loxus's large metallic body.
The giant metallic spider-scorpion curled its tail then, the lantern on the end swinging. Waltz knelt awkwardly on the slope, running his hand around the eyes of the strange creature, who lifted a leg slowly towards Waltz, nudging him gently.
Waltz straightened, turning away. 'Take is slow ok pal?' he told the thing.
He assumed the creature could understand him, he thought the scorpion could understand them, but he didn't know to what extent. The scorpion-spider thingy had been a part of Waltz's guild for some time now, but he still was fascinated by it.
'Are you alright Waltz?' Sumaey asked turning back to him.
She and Spirit were at the bottom of the slope now, waiting for the others.
'Yeah we're good' Waltz called back. 'It's just a little awkward for Loxus I think.'
Graham reached the bottom of the hill, taking the last bit in a jump and stumbling clumsily.
The cat ran past all of them as Waltz and Loxus made it down the hill together.
'Good' Waltz said dusting his hands off. 'That's the hard part out of the way. You alright Loxus?' he asked turning back to him.
Loxus looked as content as a piece of metal could look as he walked past Waltz.
Waltz smiled at the thing warmly.
'ON WITH OUR ADVENTURE!' he declared loudly, pointing dramatically off in the direction the trail of light went.
Sumaey rolled her eyes in exasperation, turning and making her way after Spirit who was already making his way off.

A short while later, the strange guild was huddled together behind a bush as they stared at a small house. A little thatched cottage sitting alone on open ground. There were paddocks with sheep and pigs in them, and chickens wandering free.
'Weird' Waltz mumbled to himself raising an eyebrow. 'I did not expect the trail to end here.'
'What were you expecting?' Sumaey frowned as she knelt beside him. 'A dark hole somewhere? Maybe in a swamp or some sinister looking cave?'
'Yes?' Waltz turned to her. 'Well I don't know' he mumbled to himself. 'I don't really know what I was expecting, but it wasn't this. Do you think whoever lives there knows he is in there? I mean why did he choose to go *there*?'
'Not all creatures are bad' Spirit spoke up then in a grumble.
A silence fell then as the others stared at the water elemental then (Graham and cat included)
'Oh, come on don't get offended' Waltz scoffed, rising to his feet then.
'Hey where are you going?' Sumaey hissed.
'I am going to say hello' Waltz grinned cruelly down at her, taking from his pocket the paralysis bomb and rolling it on his palm before pocketing it again. 'Best to move now when he is least expecting it.'
'What should *we* do?' Sumaey asked.

‘Surround the house’ Waltz answered, ‘guard the entrances. Not that he will get past me but…. you never know.’ He paused then, grimacing. ‘Hopefully the house is empty save for him. I don’t want to drag anyone else into this, it would only complicate things.’

‘Yes Captain’ Sumaey answered sarcastically, rising to her feet.

Waltz did not glance back as he made his way towards the house, drawing his sword. He moved swiftly as the others fanned out behind him, moving to surround the cottage.

Waltz entered through the front door, doing so carefully.

He moved silently, glancing about him at the rooms downstairs. There appeared to be no signs of life, and everything was silent. Waltz thought that he may be lucky then, and that the cottage was indeed empty.

‘Felix!’ Waltz called out suddenly.

He stepped forwards towards the stairs, keeping his eyes wide and alert.

‘Oh Felix!’ Waltz sang playfully, twirling his sword.

Outside the other members of the guild were surrounding the house, inside the home, Felix was alone upstairs, raising his head at the sound of Waltz voice, his body tense.

Waltz smirked then, a cruel grin spreading across his face as he made his way forwards and up the stairs, his footfalls deliberate, loud. He wanted Felix to know he was coming.

He opened the door with a slam as it hit the wall, bouncing back. Felix was waiting for him.

‘Found ya’ Waltz breathed, eyes wide with excitement. ‘I know how fast you are’ he said raising a metal ball in his hand. ‘But you won’t get past me. Not this time.’

Felix’s eyes drew straight to the object, and Waltz threw it between the chimera’s feet.

It was a paralysis bomb, and its effects were instantaneous.

Felix let out a cry, the electric shock coursing through his body. He remained standing for only a moment, before collapsing.

Waltz stood there, holding his position with his arm held out before straightening.

He stepped forwards into the room, coming to stand over the chimera. He reached down, grasping Felix by the cheeks and turning his head.

The chimera was out cold.

Waltz walked around him, grabbing him beneath his arms and dragging him across the room towards the door. He dragged Felix’s limp body down the stairs, out of the house and outside where the others waited. He was eager to get the creature out of the house in case the resident of the home arrived. He didn’t want anyone hurt. He wanted the chimera away. Here now his guild surrounded the body of Felix.

They were out in the open now. Waltz was still dragging Felix, heading away from the home, when the chimera suddenly woke.

Felix instantly began to fight him, struggling to free himself from Waltz grasp and clawing at his face and neck. Waltz instantly whipped his knife out, holding it firmly to Felix’s throat. Felix instantly stopped struggling, unable to fight, his body still weak from the parlaying bomb.

‘That’s a good lad’ Felix smirked cruelly down at him. ‘I wouldn’t struggle if I were you. It would just take one sudden move, and your throat would be slit. It wouldn’t take long for you to bleed out.’

Felix remained frozen then, laying back as Waltz knelt over him, knife still to his throat.

‘I guess it doesn’t matter’ Waltz continued as the other members of the guild came to him, surrounding the both of them to watch. ‘I’m going to kill you anyway.’

Sumaey glanced towards Waltz at this, but she didn't say anything. Beneath him Felix remained frozen.
'And after I am done killing you' Waltz continued, 'I am going to kill that fiery creature.'
Felix let out a gasp then, large eyes staring up at Waltz, pleading.
Waltz pressed the knife harder against Felix's throat, gritting his teeth and grimacing.
'Any last words chimera?'
Felix began to sob, eyes shimmering with tears.
'Please' he begged, 'please don't kill the creature…'
'Don't you care about your own life?' Felix asked.
'Please don't hurt her!' Felix cried desperately, tears streaming down his cheeks now, 'please…'
'You killed a man' Waltz hissed. 'You killed a man to protect that creature.'
'It was an accident!' Felix wailed, 'I swear I didn't mean to…I was trying to protect myself! He was going to kill me, he was going to…. he was trying to kill the fire-bird. I had to protect her.'
'Why do you care so much for that creature? Why are you trying so hard to protect her?!'
'Because I love her' Felix sobbed. 'I love her. She…. she is human and I love her.'
Waltz tightened his grip on Felix's hair, still holding the knife tightly to the chimera's throat.
'Go on' Waltz prompted.
'She…. she is a human' Felix whispered. 'She is…she is my wife.'
Waltz stared down at Felix with hollow eyes, remaining unmoved.
'Please let me live' Felix whispered. 'Please…I need to protect her…. I love her……I don't want to die…. I want to protect her…I want….to save her.'
'It's ok' Waltz spoke calmly, letting go of Felix. 'We won't hurt you.'
Felix leant forward, moving away from Waltz gingerly and resting on his knees. He caressed his throat gently before turning back to face the pink haired man.
'I didn't mean to be so rough' Waltz told him, putting his knife away. 'But it was the only way you would admit what you just did.'
Felix stared at him unmoving, eyes wide.
'I thought as much' Waltz sighed, folding his arms. 'I thought you had a love for this creature who is human at heart. But I didn't realise you were lovers. I didn't realise you would be married.'
'Tch' Felix turned away angrily then, rising to his feet. 'You tricked me.'
'Hey, at least I'm not killing you. Be grateful. Maybe now we can talk without you either attacking or running away.'
'I never meant to hurt anyone' Felix mumbled then, 'I….'
'I know' Waltz told him. 'You don't need to say anymore. I understand. And I want you to know that we are not going to hurt her. We are here to save her.'
Felix raised his head, eye widening then.
'You're…going to help?'
'We took on this quest with the intention of killing this creature that was hurting people and destroying land' Waltz explained, 'but knowing what we do now…things are different.'
'You won't kill her?' Felix asked.
'No.'

Felix straightened then, turning fully towards Waltz.
'You know of the pyromancer?' Felix questioned.
'Yes.'
Felix stared at Waltz hard, trying to figure him out, for a moment frozen as he tried to analyse him.
'You're Waltz' he spoke slowly. 'Sydney is your brother.'
'I am' Waltz nodded, 'and yes, Sydney is my brother by adoption.'
'He was adopted by your family' Felix said in a level voice.
'He told you that?' Waltz raised an eyebrow.
Felix looked past Waltz then, seeing the other members of the guild. He studied them closely, his eyes moving from each of them in turn one after the other, before finally coming to rest on the cat, who stared up at him, silent as ever.
Felix looked back to Waltz at last.
'I didn't recognise you' Felix said to Waltz. 'Your brother told me you have white-blonde hair.'
'It used to be white-blonde' Waltz replied flatly with a grin. 'But I rather like it like this now' he said running his fingers through his pink hair. 'It's pretty cool don't you think?'
'Why did you come here?' Felix asked him.
'I wanted to talk to you. And to find out about you. Lucky, I got what I wanted.'
'What are you going to do?' Felix asked him.
'I am going to meet with this pyromancer' Waltz replied, 'but before that, I wanted to meet you.'
'Why?'
'I was curious about you. What is the relationship you have with Lyle?'
'None of your business' Felix answered shortly.
Waltz smirked. 'I should have known you would say that.'
'What are you going to do?' Felix asked him loudly now as Waltz turned and began to walk away.
'I have work to do' Waltz replied, pausing and glancing back at the chimera. 'As do you.'
'I thought you had a contract' Felix replied. 'You…took a quest I thought…because I killed a man…. I thought there would be a contract on my life.'
'If you were to die' Waltz smirked, 'then it would not be my fault. It would not be by my hands. Just stay alive okay?'
'Sure' Felix replied flatly. 'And you don't die either.'
'Are you serious?' Waltz turned back then, continuing to walk backwards without slowing down as the others walked around him. 'I am stronger and wiser than *you* are. Don't be bested so easily next time.'
Felix did not reply, but continued to watch the guild as they slowly moved away.

'Interesting character don't you think?' Waltz said to Sumaey as they walked away.
'You didn't need to scare him like that' Sumaey answered flatly.
'Oh, come on, I didn't cause any harm' Waltz waved his hands.
He glanced over his shoulder then, seeing the chimera still watching them as they went.

‘I have been wanting to meet him properly for some time’ Waltz breathed, eyes gleaming with excitement. ‘What fun.’
‘So what now?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘That date is coming closer’ Waltz frowned at her. ‘We have to meet the pyromancer soon. We have to travel fast, and attend this amazing fancy-peoples party…’
‘Great’ Sumaey droned. ‘Can’t wait…’

Chapter Thirteen
A Hard Floor

It was a sometime later when Waltz and Sumaey stood side by side on the deck of a ship, sailing across the waters to take them to the other land, where they would finally attend as Waltz like to call it, ‘the fancy peoples party’.
They had decided (Waltz had decided) to travel alone with Sumaey.
‘If anyone were to see you guys with us’ he had said to Spirit and the others, ‘it would like…. *totally* blow our cover you guys!’
Spirit did not like this idea, he did not like the thought of being apart from Sumaey, but she agreed with Waltz.
‘He’s right’ she had said. ‘We’re supposed to be masquerading as husband and wife.’
Behind Sumaey Waltz began to smirk.
‘But if Waltz touches me I will break his teeth.’
Waltz froze then, swiftly turning around to hide his face as Sumaey glanced back at him, a dangerous look in her eyes.
‘But yes, it would look suspicious if you guys were with us’ Sumaey finished.
‘I suppose you are right’ Spirit grumbled reluctantly.
‘I know you don’t want to but we need to do this’ Sumaey urged him.
Spirit raised his head slightly.
‘It might help you overcome your fear of people’ Sumaey offered.
‘Yeah maybe’ Spirit had grumbled.
And so, Spirit, Graham and Loxus stayed behind to catch the next ship, while Waltz and Sumaey travelled first. The nameless cat had decided to go with them, Waltz had tried to shoo it away, insisting that it had to stay with Spirit and the others, but it either did not understand or was not listening and didn’t care. Probably the latter.
Waltz could see it now hiding behind some barrels on the deck of the ship. Keeping out of sight but watching both Waltz and Sumaey closely.
‘Such a strange creature’ Waltz murmured.
‘What was that?’ Sumaey voiced.
‘That cat’ Waltz said turning around and leaning back, folding his arms. ‘It’s so strange, I still wonder about it.’
‘Yeah me too.’
‘Think of all the amazing things it might know…if only it could tell us.’

‘It may know nothing. Don’t get your hopes up and let your imagination run wild. I know what you’re like.’
‘I know’ Waltz said shoulders slumped. ‘I just uh…. get carried away.’
‘I know.’
Sumaey turned to him. She looked beautiful with the wind in her hair.
‘How is the egg?’
‘My precious baby?’
‘Don’t get weird’ Sumaey frowned.
Waltz turned away. ‘It’s safe’ he replied. He craned his head back, staring up at the clouds. ‘I can’t wait until it hatches.’
‘Come on’ Sumaey said straightening. ‘We should get some rest, it’s going to get dark soon.’
As they walked across the deck, the cat leapt out of its hiding place, trailing after them.
‘Oh yeah I just remembered’ Sumaey voiced then. ‘There’s only one bed. You’re sleeping on the floor <3’
Waltz dipped his head, groaning loudly.

Chapter Fourteen
Sexy Sexy Room-Service

The ship docked the next day at around midday, and Waltz and Sumaey left the ship quickly.
‘Oh, it’s so good to be off that thing.’
‘We weren’t on there long’ Sumaey frowned at Waltz.
‘Yeah but I hate being confined like that, stuck in a wooden box rocking back and forth…’
‘Stop your whining’ Sumaey interrupted before he had the chance to continue.
‘Should we hold hands?’ Waltz gleamed turning to her.
‘Only if you want it broken’ Sumaey answered shortly not looking at him.
‘We should find maybe somewhere to eat, and wait for the next ship to come in. Don’t want to leave Spirit and the others on their own for too long. I don’t think they’ll like it.’
‘I’m sure they will be fine’ Sumaey said dismissively. ‘Why, are you worried about them?’
‘No?’ Waltz answered innocently. ‘I just would hate for Spirit to pine for you too much.’
Sumaey gave him an unamused expression.
‘Ok well…. I am a little hungry anyway’ she said offhandedly. ‘I could do with something to eat.’
‘Oh look’ Waltz spoke up then. ‘A convenient place to eat located right by the harbour where we can watch the ships come in. Maybe we should eat there?’
Sumaey strode past him without acknowledging his words, marching towards the tranquil looking café, with the cat following closely after her.
Waltz bowed low then sarcastically.
‘After you my lady’ he spoke to the air, before following her.

They stayed here for several hours, sitting at a crudely cut table and watching the waters nearby.
'Is that the ship?' Sumaey spoke up breaking the silence.
Waltz who had been resting with his head on his folded arms looked up blearily then.
'Uh....yeah' he mumbled wiping the dribble from the corner of his mouth. 'That's the one.'
They waited a little longer, watching as the ship docked and the passengers got off. At last after most had left the ship, Spirit, Graham and Loxus finally stepped off the gangplank, Spirit looking around for them.
'Yoo hoo!' Waltz waved at them.
Spirit turned towards him, making his way over as Graham and Loxus began to play with each other on the harbour, Graham teasing the great creature and running around it, Loxus trying to catch him.
'Did you enjoy the trip?' Waltz asked Spirit merrily as the water elemental took a seat at the table beside the cat.
'It was fine' Spirit replied.
'Oh, wait I just remembered we're not supposed to be seen with you' Waltz spoke quickly.
'It's ok' Spirit answered with a smile (he rarely smiled) 'I don't mind waiting in the forest.'
'Yes, I know you hate people' Waltz sighed, resting his chin on his palm. 'If we ever need to reach you, we will use smoke signals.'
'Or' Sumaey overrode him, 'meet at night.'
'Or meet at night' Waltz concluded.
'Where will you stay?' Spirit asked them.
'There is a coal-town a few miles from here' Waltz replied seriously. 'We will travel there by carriage.' He paused. 'Tomorrow will be the day we finally get to meet the pyromancer, this infamous fellow.'
'I'm a little nervous' Sumaey voiced.
'Not about your dancing I hope?' Waltz sighed at her.
'What if I give us away?'
Waltz shrugged carelessly.
'I'm sure it will be fine. Just try to remain inconspicuous. I will take the lead.'
Sumaey did not speak, Waltz could tell that she was really worried.
'Hey' he smiled, reaching out and taking her by the hand. 'It's going to be ok.'
Sumaey glanced up at him, a little startled at first, before her expression broke into a smile.
'Thanks Waltz' she sighed. 'I trust you.'

That night, Waltz and Sumaey stayed at the inn, having travelled the distance by coach. It was an uneventful trip. Sumaey had stared out through the window as they travelled, wondering where the others were now, Spirit and Graham and Loxus. Even the cat now was missing. It was just the two of them.
'Do you think they will be ok?' Sumaey had spoken.
'I'm sure they will be fine' Waltz mumbled.

Sumaey glanced over at him. Waltz was lying back against the soft seat in the carriage, resting on his back with one foot propped up against his knee, and his arms folded behind his head. His eyes were closed, and he dozed peacefully.
'Are you really this calm?' Sumaey asked turning away from the window.
'I'm chill as cucumber' Waltz replied.
Sumaey fell silent. Waltz opened his eyes, looking over at her.
'Relax' he sighed. 'It's going to be ok.'
It wasn't long after that, they reached their destination.
Now, they had settled into their room at the inn, a modest room, but comfortable.
Waltz was taking a bath, a very bubbly bath with lots of bubbles. They covered the surface of the water, filling the tub and spilling onto the floor.
'If you stay in there for too long you'll shrivel up' Sumaey told him.
'But I would be the sexiest raisin in the land.'
Sumaey smirked at that.
She turned away then, looking out through the window to the dark setting outside.
'Still worrying about the others?' Waltz asked her.
'No?'
'Don't lie.'
Waltz sat up quickly, splashing water everywhere. He began to rummage around him, feeling through the water.
'Found it!'
He lifted from the bubbles a little rubber duck.
'So freekin cute!' he squealed happily.
'You really *are* this calm?' Sumaey said to him.
'You really *are* this stressed?' he replied.
Sumaey did not answer.
'No, I just pretend to be calm' Waltz replied sarcastically. 'Of course I am actually this calm. Everything is going fine.'
'But what if we get found out?'
'Why are you worrying about it so much?' Waltz asked turning to face her, resting with his arm over the edge of the tub. 'We've done jobs of all kinds before. Why are you worried about this one?'
'This one is different' Sumaey mumbled. 'I don't know I just…. I am nervous about meeting the pyromancer.'
'You can't stop yourself from feeling nervous' Waltz replied. 'Just don't let him know it, then he will go in for the kill…. if he can sense your fear.' He spoke to the rubber duck now. 'That's right' he cooed to the yellow rubber duck. 'He will attack you and fight you and then you will be dead.'
Sumaey grimaced at that.
'I'm hungry' Waltz declared suddenly and loudly then, rising to his feet and somehow managing to keep the bubbles wrapped nicely around his waist so that nothing was hanging out. 'I want some waffles!' he put his hands on his knees, gleaming at Sumaey. 'Do you like waffles?' he asked Sumaey then.
'I prefer pancakes.'

Waltz got out of the bath then (butt-neked but still appropriately and safely covered in foam) he was just making his way towards the door when he slipped and fell on his face.
'……ow.'
Sumaey tutted at him, bowing her head as she rose to her feet.
'I will call room service then' she offered, walking past him without looking down.
'I'm fine' he groaned sitting up.
She slammed the door, leaving him alone in the room.
'Don't I even get a little bit of sympathy?' Waltz asked the closed door, speaking in the ringing silence.

Chapter Fifteen
A Turn of Events

Today was the day. Today was the day that Waltz and Sumaey were to meet the pyromancer.
'My wife' Waltz said to Sumaey, holding his arm out for her to take.
Sumaey turned towards him, taking his arm gently.
Waltz faced ahead again, and together, posing as husband and wife, they moved forwards through the entrance doors of the grand building, entering the vast hall within.
Everything was grand, everything was beautiful.
There were very wide stairs curving upwards towards the level above, balconies where guests overlooked the hall below where people danced.
The interior was ostentation, the materials used to build the hall were lavish, and thick curtains hung around the edges of the room.
There were many guests within this place, gentle and pleasant music played over the murmur of voices as the guests spoke to each other. The food that was available, was laid out on massive tables on one side of the room close to the doors.
'Oh excellent' Waltz gleamed as he looked at these things.
The plates were piled high with an assortment of expensive and exotic foods, beautifully crafted pieces of cake that was small enough to each in one bite, savoury quiches and shrimp dipped in succulent sauces, and assortments of rare and delicious fruits…
'It all looks so good' Waltz spoke quietly to his pretend wife. 'Do you mind if I partake?' he asked Sumaey.
'Go ahead' she sighed.
Waltz let go of her and approached the table, reaching for one of the plates.
Sumaey watched him with surprise. He looked so at home in this environment. Though it was so strange for her to see him dressed as he was, in an eastern style, his pink hair hidden away by a neatly folded turban.
Sumaey wore a blue dress, a very expensive piece, that matched the environment and the expensive clothes the other guests around them wore. But wearing it, she felt so out of her skin.

She stared at her reflection in the great mirror upon the wall, thinking about how much she missed her old clothes.
Her dress was blue, and modest in design.
Sumaey stared at herself as Waltz ate slowly.
'If you eat you might feel a little more relaxed.'
Sumaey tilted her head back towards the balcony above them.
'Is that him?' she spoke.
Waltz glanced around, seeing a figure above them dressed in fine emerald clothes. He was a mature figure, imposing. He had a very strong presence within the room.
Waltz turned back to Sumaey then with a serious expression.
'Yeah it is.'
'Great' Sumaey grumbled.
'We are not supposed to meet him for a few hours' Waltz told Sumaey. 'We should enjoy the party, mingle a little…look like we belong here.'
'He doesn't know what we look like' Sumaey said to Waltz. 'I mean…what the merchant looks like…or his wife.'
'That's right' Waltz replied, keeping his voice low as Sumaey had been doing. 'We are safe as long as we play the game right.'
He took Sumaey by the hand gently then, leaning forwards and kissing her on the lips gently, but only briefly.
He straightened then, still holding her hand. He had his back to the pyromancer.
'Is he watching us?'
'He is watching all of the guests' Sumaey replied levelly.
Waltz turned away from her.
'Let's go to the centre stage' he said referring to the part of the hall where the couples danced.
Sumaey moved to keep up with him.
'How will he recognise us?' Sumaey asked, referring to the pyromancer.
'He will recognise me' Waltz told her. 'This merchant is known for his dancing. And so am I.'
'You are known for you dancing?' Sumaey asked him raising and eyebrow.
'I already told you' he grinned knowingly at her. 'I am an expert dancer. Why do you think my parents named me 'Waltz?' he tilted his head at her playfully. 'I'm rather good' he told her, 'though I say so myself.'
'And ever the modest one' Sumaey sighed turning away.
They walked side by side through the crowd, moving carefully amongst the guests.
'Please don't make me dance' Sumaey told him nervously under her breath.
'I will avoid it if I can' Waltz told her. 'But if you do have to dance, remember what I told you.'
She bowed her head.
It was at that moment they came across a familiar figure.
'You've got to be kidding me' Waltz groaning, coming to a stop with Sumaey still holding his arm. 'I should have known I would see you again soon, though I didn't think it would be here.'

Lyle raised an eyebrow at them, glancing first from Waltz to Sumaey and back again.
'Why are you here?' Lyle asked flatly, 'you're not high-born.'
'You see that is where you're wrong' Waltz replied flatly. 'I am of royal blood, my wife on the other hand, is not.'
'Your wife' Lyle repeated flatly.
'Only for a few hours.'
'So, what are you going to do?' Lyle asked him. 'Why are you here and what are you planning?'
'I could ask the same of you' Waltz interrupted.
'You're going to ruin everything' Lyle hissed, his face contorting in a snarl, though he kept his voice low so that no one other than Waltz and Sumaey could hear. 'You should not *be* here.'
'We can here on Sydney's request' Waltz replied.
'Sydney?'
'My brother?'
Lyle stared at him flatly, jaw clenched.
'So, he has some plans for you' Lyle said. 'You are here to get the serum? It won't work.'
'And why would you say that?'
Lyle shook his head, turning away and glancing towards the balcony, before looking back at Waltz.
'Let's go talk somewhere quieter' Lyle suggested, and he, Waltz and Sumaey moved through the crowd to a secluded corner where no one would hear or see them. The music in the hall continued to play and the guests were having a good time.
They stood behind one of the large columns then, out of sight of the others.
'Where should I begin?' Lyle mumbled to himself.
'Perhaps start with the pyromancer' Waltz suggested as Sumaey let go of his arm, straightening. 'After all, is that not why we are here?'
'He is my father you know…well…my step-father.'
'Really?'
'The…. bird you were trying to kill…. the fire-bird…it is actually my sister, and the only child the pyromancer has.'
'How could he do that to his own daughter?' Sumaey asked, speaking for the first time.
Lyle only shook his head.
'This all began with…' he broke off then.
'What's wrong?' Waltz asked him.
Lyle sighed. 'I suppose there is no harm in telling you…. Sydney trusts you after all. Sydney and I have been working together for a long time to bring the pyromancer down.' Lyle swallowed the lump in his throat, clenching his jaw. 'It all began with Felix.'
'Felix?'
'The chimera you met, his name is Felix.'
'Interesting' Waltz said scratching his chin. 'And yes, I knew his name. I am just surprised that its him this all began with. I was wondering what part he played in this.'
'The pyromancer only had one child of his own, a daughter, and she fell in love with Felix.' Lyle sighed then sadly. 'My sister…I miss her so much. We share the same mother, but have

different fathers. I am…. disregarded from the family because…. well…the rumours were…' he trailed off.
'It's difficult to talk about I know' Waltz finished. 'After all, she is your mother, but Sydney already told me that part. You and your sister were both her children, but the pyromancer was only father to one of you, your sister. That is why you were treated as an outcast.'
'Yes' Lyle nodded sadly. 'I…grew up thinking he was my father, I loved him, but as soon as it emerged that I was not his son…well…. things took a turn for the worst. My mother mysteriously went missing, many speculate that she is dead, though those are only rumours. I hear them…though never directly. People talk about you when you are high profile, they whisper behind your back, and they think you don't know about it. But because I am now separate from the family…because I am now ostracized, I have more freedom in a way.'
'You said this all began with Felix.'
'Yes' Lyle nodded to Waltz. 'He was the one to first find out the truth about our family.'
'And he spoke about it?' Waltz asked.
Lyle frowned.
'He…was a cunning man. His senses were sharp. My father…' Lyle paused then before carrying on. 'He conducted experiments. They were…some of them were truly terrible. And very illegal. Felix found out. He managed to escape, but they caught him soon after.' Lyle paused then before continuing. 'My father imprisoned his own daughter to lure him into a trap. Felix knew, but he came anyway, because he loved my sister. He experimented on Felix, testing his new theories on Felix and…' Lyle let out another sigh. 'I only knew about this when it was all over, months after it was all over. Felix and my sister were both missing for the longest time. My father only offered a weak excuse to those around him as to where they went, but I was afraid to ask him myself. I was a coward. I didn't know what to do. Eventually my sister who was held captive in my father's lab managed to escape. Her confinements were not as secure, and I don't know how she got out but…when she did manage to free herself, she did not run away, but went straight to Felix, who she knew was locked up in the lab. He was under far tighter security, chained to the table, but because they were alone at the time, my sister managed to break him out. She saw what my father did to him, he was no longer human, but a half-breed. His genetic mixed with that of another creature. He was a chimera. My sister was horrified at what her father had done. She would never forgive him, because she loved Felix. They tried to escape together, Felix had developed super speed, his body infused with magic now. He managed to dodge the guards as the alarm was raised of their escape. I remember standing at the window, looking out at the courtyard as it happened. I couldn't believe what I saw. I remember my sister screaming for Felix to run. She didn't care what happened to her, she only wanted to save him. They truly loved each other.' He fell silent for a time, Waltz and Sumaey watching silently without reaction. 'I didn't see my sister again after that, but Felix came to me a few night later when I was out alone. He had been watching me for a long time since that night, waiting for an opportunity to approach me. I couldn't believe what I saw, how his body had changed…but I recognised his face still, and his voice. I knew it was him. He told me everything, so we went looking for my sister, but by then it was too late. My father had already turned her into that creature to force her to keep her silence instead of killing her. I suppose that is one small mercy at least, that she is still alive. But she has been this way for so long…its very likely she

has forgotten who she is. Forgotten that she is human. It was shortly after she was set upon the lands, then Sydney found us, well he found Felix' Lyle corrected. 'Your brother has a very strong fascination with chimeras. Felix was suspicious at first, but then he began to trust him. And so, we started working together, that was many months ago.'
'And you've been protecting her ever since' Waltz nodded.
'Felix and I both.'
'It all makes sense now' Sumaey mumbled.
'What does the serum do?' Waltz asked Lyle.
'I don't know' Lyle shook his head. 'I cannot know for sure.'
He pursed his lips, biting them nervously.
'I should go' he said to them. 'I've told you everything you need to know. Continue with your plan if you feel that is right' Lyle said, 'but don't expect it to end well.'
'We planned this with Sydney' Waltz said tilting his head. 'We're not going in blind.'
'Do what you must' Lyle said turning away. 'In any case, I have to go now.'
He turned and strode away, disappearing back into the crowd.
'What a strange man' Waltz mumbled to himself.
'It's making me nervous' Sumaey remarked. 'Do you think we should continue the plan?'
'Of course,' Waltz replied. 'We planned it with Sydney, we can't back down now. Come on, we should join the rest of the party again.'
They came to the edge of the open area where the couples danced. Waltz's attention flickered up towards the pyromancer again, seeing him conversing with a young woman. She was a beauty, with very dark skin and a dark dress, a real jewel.
'I wonder who that is.'
Sumaey looked around to see what Waltz was looking at.
'That woman?' she frowned. 'Probably a highborn lady.'
As they watched the pyromancer, they saw him reach his hand out towards the woman, taking her hand in his own very briefly, before she walked past him, moving with a smile playing about her lips.
'Perfect' Waltz muttered, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully and scratching at his chin. 'I know what to do.'
'Why does that make me nervous?' Sumaey mumbled. 'Why, what are you going to do?'
'I am going to dance with her…. look she's coming this way.'
They watched as the woman descended one of the curved stairs, the hem of her dress trailing after her, the dark material sparkling.
She looked like a goddess, and was so beautiful.
'Woah' Sumaey mumbled. 'She's…'
'Utterly captivating?' Waltz offered.
Sumaey glanced sideways at him.
Waltz straightened then, looking away briefly as the woman passed by them, walking behind them at a distance and moving over towards one of the columns.
Waltz listened to the music, watching the others as they danced.
He glanced to the side again, his attention moving through the hall and straight towards the woman.
She leant back against the column now, simply watching the other guests.

‘Wait here’ Waltz mumbled to Sumaey.
Sumaey swallowed the lump in her throat nervously, watching as Waltz moved away from her. She didn’t want to see him go, she didn’t want to be left alone, but had no choice.

Waltz approached the woman, whose eyes turned quickly onto him as he drew closer.
‘My lady’ Waltz spoke confidently, bowing with one hand on his chest, the other behind his back. ‘May I have a dance?’
‘That was bold of you’ the woman told him straightening. ‘Do you know who I am?’
‘I do not’ Waltz admitted straightening now. ‘I am not from around these parts. I am a merchant. I don’t often come to these lands, but I was invited to party for…*business purposes*. But that does not mean I cannot enjoy myself beforehand.’
The dark-skinned woman smiled at him. It was a strange smile, not entirely pleasant, not entirely friendly. It was as if the woman knew something he didn’t.
‘I would love to dance with you’ she said offering her hand for him to take.
‘My lady’ Waltz spoke sincerely. ‘Dare I ask you name?’
They turned towards the centre of the hall, walking slowly onto the dancing area.
‘My name?’ the woman asked as they moved towards the centre of the hall.
She stopped in the centre, and each turned the face the other.
Waltz took one of her hands in his, the other he placed on her waist, as she did the same to him.
‘My name’ the beautiful woman spoke, ‘is Ebony-Snow.’
‘An unusual name’ Waltz replied.
‘And what is your name?’
‘My name is Waltz.’
The edges of the woman’s eyes crinkled in amusement.
‘I know’ Waltz nodded. ‘It’s a very unusual name. I get told that all the time.’
The woman bowed her head but said nothing, for a moment she continued to look down, before meeting his eyes again.
Waltz led her as they began to dance along with the music, each of their footsteps perfectly co-ordinated with each other, perfectly co-ordinated with the music.
‘You’re pretty good’ the woman admitted.
‘I know I am’ Waltz gleamed at her, eyes shining, reflecting the lights all around them within the hall. ‘I have been dancing ever since I learned how to walk.’
Ebony-Snow grinned then, almost a predatory smile.
‘That sounds like a challenge.’
‘Is it?’ Waltz asked, eyebrow twitching upwards.
‘Let’s put you to the test’ she said stopping him suddenly and raising her hand, emanating from it a ball of light.
The people around them stopped dancing then, turning towards the couple in the middle as they moved away from the dance floor.
On the balcony above the pyromancer watched, his attention fixed on this pair now. On the edge of the floor, Sumaey watched nervously.
Ebony-Snow’s smiled widened then, and she turned to the musicians at the head of the hall, standing upon a raised platform.

They were watching her now, and she gave them a few silent hand-signals, and they began to play a new tune.
'Ah' Waltz grinned. 'A beautiful piece, and a very difficult one to dance.'
'Should be no trouble for you' Ebony-Snow said to him, taking his hand again and placing her other hand on his hips, as he did the same to her again.
They began to dance together, and it was utterly captivating.
The everyone within the hall watched the pair now, from the ground, and the balcony above, they listened to the music silently, and watched the pair dancing.
Their footsteps were calculated, their movements graceful, they held each other close, like lovers, turning on the spot slowly.
It was a slow yet complicated dance, and the crowd around them were utterly captivated by what they saw.
It was beautiful.

When the dance finally came to an end, there was clapping, which began gradual, growing steadily louder.
'I am actually impressed' Ebony-Snow said to him. 'That was…. utterly flawless.'
'You're not so bad yourself' Waltz gleamed. 'Though I'm glad I can surprise you.'
'It looks like someone important has their eye on you.'
Waltz blinked at her, turning to glance up at the pyromancer.
'Walter Jules Frey' Waltz uttered. 'There you.'
'Are you expecting a meeting with him?' Ebony-Snow asked him.
'Indeed I am' Waltz replied. 'My wife and I both.'
'He's staying just a little longer' Ebony-Snow replied. 'You may as well enjoy another dance' she said as music began to start up again, and other couples moved onto the floor to dance once more. 'Is that your wife?'
'Indeed it is' Waltz said again.
He smiled at Sumaey then, giving her a wave.
Sumaey who was watching both of them waved back.
'She is so beautiful' Ebony-Snow voiced. 'That dress is stunning.'
'She *is* beautiful' Waltz replied. 'Sumaey is very precious to me.'
'Well I won't take any more of your time' Ebony-Snow said giving a curtsey. 'We will meet again.'
She drifted away then without another word, looking gorgeous, almost too perfect, like a celestial spirit.
'Woah' Waltz said to himself. 'She is really something.'
He watched her until she disappeared from his line of sight, then he turned back to Sumaey, beaconing her over to him.
Sumaey stepped onto the dance floor reluctantly, approaching Waltz who took her hand and began to dance to the next tune, an easy dance.
'That was amazing' Sumaey breathed, a little flushed.
'I know' Waltz grinned. 'I am…. *really good*.'
She smiled at him.
'So, when do we meet him?'

‘Soon’ Waltz replied to Sumaey. ‘He has been watching us all night.’
‘I know’ Sumaey mumbled as they continued to dance. ‘It’s been making me nervous.’
‘Well as long as you don’t show it.’
Sumaey smiled widely then to hide her fear.
‘That’s better’ Waltz grinned back.
Sumaey glanced up as they continued to dance, seeing the pyromancer moving across the balcony and heading down the stairs.
‘He’s coming this way’ Sumaey spoke carefully.
‘Towards us?’
‘He wants to speak to us I think.’
Waltz stopped dancing then, letting go of Sumaey.
‘Then let’s go.’
Waltz turned and walked towards the pyromancer, moving with surety with Sumaey following directly behind him.
Waltz paused as he reached the pyromancer, giving him an intent stare.
‘That was quite exceptional’ Walter said to Waltz. ‘I have rarely seen someone who can match Ebony-Snow.’
‘She is an exceptional woman’ Waltz replied sincerely.
The pyromancer turned his body fully now to face Waltz and Sumaey both.
‘It’s a beautiful night tonight, would you not agree?’
Waltz smiled at the lord, recognising the code, and answering in turn.
‘Yes’ he replied. ‘The owls are most beautiful, they sing a dark song of grief and mischief.’
The pyromancer dipped his head.
‘Come with me’ he said.
The pyromancer turned and walked away then, Waltz followed after him, and they moved slowly through the crowd, heading away from the party.
As they went, Sumaey reached out to Waltz, taking him by the hand. Waltz squeezed her hand back in a gesture of encouragement, before she let go of him.
The three of them left the hall, and passed through an archway, walking down a narrow corridor.
They turned a right, walked a bit more, passed a few doors, turned a left, before entering a door a little further on.
They entered into a sort of small office-study area.
The door swung shut behind them.
‘You are here for the serum’ the pyromancer spoke seriously, bowing his head.
‘What is your price?’ Waltz asked.
‘You know you were so close’ Walter smiled.
Waltz stared at him, swallowing the lump in his throat.
‘……oh balls’ he said.
Sumaey’s eyes widened then as she saw several soldiers step out from the darkness around them, grabbing them both.
Waltz tried to put up a fight, throwing his head back and smashing the nose of the man behind him. He whipped around, summoning magic to him to attack. But someone hit him from behind hard, and Waltz fell to his feet groaning.

He was grabbed around the body and hauled to his feet.
The pyromancer turned back to the room, moving slowly in a circle, eyes moving first from Sumaey, lingering on her for a long time, before turning back onto Waltz.
They were held now each by a guard, a towering figure, with tons of muscle.
Sumaey raised her head slightly, eyes wide as she glanced towards Waltz. He looked calm.
'You thought I would be fooled so easily?' Walter asked them.
'No?' Waltz replied. 'What gave us away?'
'*She* did.'
They turned towards Sumaey simultaneously and she tensed, hunching her shoulders.
'You had me fooled' Walter admitted, speaking to Waltz now. 'I'm sure you know that I have never met the merchant before.'
'I did' Waltz answered shortly. 'So, what *exactly* gave us away?'
Walter moved closer to Sumaey, Waltz tensed as Walter reached out to her, caressing her cheek tenderly.
'There is something strange about you' he spoke seriously to her, staring at her intently.
'Answer the question' Waltz snapped. 'What gave us away?'
Walter was silent for a moment, still touching Sumaey's cheek. She did not flinch, but could not keep the look of disgust from her face.
'I have never met the merchant before, the one I was supposed to deal with. He is dead I presume?' Walter asked.
'He is' Waltz replied shortly.
'I still knew a lot about him' Walter continued, 'even though I never actually met him, and I knew, his wife…was an excellent dancer. Not like you.'
Sumaey's composure cracked then, and her face contorted in grief, glancing over towards Waltz.
'I'm sorry' she whispered.
'It's ok' he replied, forcing a grin. 'It's ok…'
'There is something about you' Walter repeated, withdrawing his hand from Sumaey, 'and you too' he said turning back to Waltz. 'You are not human. Neither of you are.'
'Care to share?' Waltz asked hopefully.
'You don't know?' Walter answered, reading his expression. 'No' he said staring at Waltz intently. 'You know' he said turning away from Waltz and staring now at Sumaey. 'You don't.' He smiled. 'Well' he said sighing, 'I suppose it will give you some closure…. before you die.' He glanced towards Waltz now. 'This woman is a celestial. She came from the sky yes? As a drop of water? Or a cloud?'
'Hu?' Waltz stared in confusion.
'She's a celestial creature' Walter breathed. 'Practically a demi-god.'
'What?' Waltz gasped, 'she…she's a celestial creature? But they are insanely powerful. That cannot be true....'
'She is not human' the pyromancer continued, not listening to Waltz. 'She is…. part of the sky itself, such power she possesses, but she cannot unleash her power, she does not know how…it is locked inside of her…...'
Sumaey stared at Walter with a level expression, her teeth clenched shut.
'And you' Walter said glancing to Waltz again. 'You are not human.'

‘How do you know these things?’ Waltz asked.
‘I have many powers’ Walter replied. ‘I can *sense* you…. I cannot explain, you would not understand.’
‘Alright what am I then?’ Waltz asked shortly, clearly not expecting a correct answer.
‘You are a fairy….am I right?’
Waltz stared at Walter hard then, before smirking and turning away.
‘You are half right’ Waltz replied. ‘I am only half fairy. My mother was a powerful magical woman, my father was a fairy, I inherited my fabulous wings from him. Beautiful they are…...like a dragonfly’s….’
‘Interesting’ Walter mused. ‘Fairies are rare. Where to do you come from?’
Waltz let out a heavy sigh, bowing his head reluctantly.
‘I don’t come from this world. I come from another realm, the fairy realm, my grandfather…he is king there.’
‘How come you are not there with your family?’
‘My father….’ Waltz mumbled, ‘he…. was …...mmmm…’ Waltz bowed his head. ‘There were difficulties in the family. My father was cast out, and then he found my mother…she was a slave, he bought her and…well…. here I am.’
‘How nice’ Walter replied flatly.
He drew a long thin knife from the inside of his jacket, and without warning stabbed Sumaey in the belly.
Sumaey doubled over, gasping in shock as Waltz let out a cry.
‘*YOU FUCKING SON OF A BITCH!*’ he snarled.
Waltz’s body began to glow suddenly then and he glanced down at his chest in surprise.
In one swift move he threw his head back, headbutting the man behind him (again) and freeing himself, rushing over to Sumaey and catching her in his arms as she fell. The light enveloped both him and Sumaey as he hugged her, then the two of them vanished together.
Waltz felt his stomach lurch. When next he opened his eyes, he saw they were in a different location, he and Sumaey.
Waltz straightened, whipping his head around. He saw the witch standing behind him.
‘It’s you’ he gasped.
She sneered down at him. ‘Why is *she* here?’ the witch asked immediately.
Waltz glanced back at Sumaey, heart constricting in his chest.
‘*Please save her’* he begged, turning back to the witch, Sumaey before him lay still, her breath in shallow gasps as she bled out. She would have only minutes left.
‘Why?’ the witch replied calmly. ‘She means nothing to me.’
A sudden anger gripped Waltz then and he screamed at the witch in pure and uncontrolled rage.
‘YOU MURDERED MY ENTIRE GUILD!’ he howled. ‘IF YOU DON’T SAVE HER THEN YOU WILL NEVER GET ANYTHING FROM ME EVER AGAIN! IF SHE DIES HERE NOW BECAUSE YOU DIDN’T SAVE HER…...THEN I WILL KILL MYSELF!’
The witch hesitated, staring at Waltz with a level expression.
‘I know you can do it’ Waltz moaned through gritted teeth. ‘Just how important are my services to you?’
The witch unfolded her arms, walking around Sumaey.

‘This is going to hurt a lot’ the witch said. ‘I’m going to burn her insides, close the wound. Hold her legs.’
Waltz immediately obeyed, coming to sit on Sumaey’s knees as the witch knelt on Sumaey’s arm, pressing a hand to her belly, over Sumaey’s open wound.
Sumaey began to scream, grabbing the witch’s hand that pressed to her wound.
Waltz turned his head away, gritting his teeth with tears in his eyes.
Sumaey I’m sorry…
The witch smacked Sumaey’s hand away, continuing to perform her spell. She forcibly healed her.
After a time, the witch withdrew her hand, rising to her feet and straightening, blood covered her hand.
‘She’s going to be fine’ the witch told Waltz as he got off her legs, crawling forwards closer to Sumaey to speak to her.
‘Sumaey?’ Waltz uttered.
‘Oh Waltz’ Sumaey sobbed, tears streaming from the corners of her eyes.
Waltz was dragged away from her then and pulled to his feet, though the witch had not touched him.
‘There is something I need you to do’ the witch said to him, moving to stand between Waltz and Sumaey, blocking Sumaey from view.
Waltz tried to see past the witch, but she wouldn’t let him. Waltz finally looked at the witch, meeting her eyes, still in a state of shock.
‘Are you going to do what I ask?’ the witch said to Waltz. ‘I *have* saved her.’
‘Y-yes’ Waltz fumbled, wiping his tears away furiously, tears of pain and frustration.
The witch raised her hand slowly, transporting herself and Waltz to another place far away.
It had been dark in the room they had been in, but here out in the open the sun was bright.
Waltz shielded his eyes.
‘I hope you will not be distracted’ the witch began promptly. ‘I hope you will have your mind on the task.
‘Yes’ Waltz nodded. ‘You…saved her life. I was just incredibly lucky that…you came when you did.’
‘I need you to kill some people’ the witch said to Waltz, ignoring his words.
Waltz hung his head, his heart sinking in his chest.
‘Go on.’
‘There is a man’ the witch said to him, ‘I have put a tracker on him so that he shines through any surface. Only you can see this beacon.’
‘I see him’ Waltz droned, looking away then. The light from this point was blindingly bright in his eyes, it was unavoidable. ‘You want me to kill him?’
‘I want you to kill his family.’
Waltz let out a sob, tears streaming down his cheeks.
‘Who…who are they?’
‘A wife and two children.’
‘How old are the children?’
‘I think they are….two and five years.’
Waltz buried his face in his hands.

‘I hope that won’t be a problem’ the witch told him curtly.
‘Will you return me to Sumaey after?’
‘Yes. So you’ll do it soon?’
‘Yes. I have no choice.’
‘Then we have nothing to discuss’ the witch smirked. She took a small token from her person and tossed it to Waltz who caught it. ‘Use this to contact me when you are done and I will bring you back again. Your companion will be waiting.’
‘You will look after her?’
The witch stared at him flatly. Waltz blinked, and she was suddenly gone.
He glanced around him, but he knew she would not be there.
Waltz turned now towards the beacon, squinting.
He was in a wheat field now, and everything around him was so peaceful and tranquil.
Waltz tried not to think.

Chapter Sixteen
Missing

The witch returned to the place she had first summoned Waltz and Sumaey. It was a small home, built in the side of a rocky slope, just a short distance away from a dingy town.
This building was secluded, and it was empty, save for the witch and Sumaey now.
There were two stories in the building, and Sumaey was upstairs at this time, resting peacefully on the bed.
The witch entered the home, closing the door quietly behind her and casting her eyes about the room. She raised her head, looking towards the stairs.
She stepped forwards, ascending, taking the steps carefully one at a time, the hem of her mottled dress trailing after her.
She entered one of the rooms upstairs, turning to the side to see Sumaey lying on the bed.
Sumaey had heard the witch coming, she sat up in the bed now, staring at her with wide eyes.
The witch stared Sumaey silently for a time before speaking.
‘Waltz will be gone for a while.’
‘What have you done?’
‘He’s doing a job for me’ the witch answered shortly. ‘I don’t know when he will be back. That depends on him.’
Sumaey said nothing, and the witch stepped into the room further.
‘You are fascinating aren’t you.’
‘What?’ Sumaey gasped.
‘Do you know what you are?’
Sumaey stared back at the witch, lost for words.
‘As far as I come to understand, you fell from the sky.’
‘How do you know?’ Sumaey uttered.

‘I have been watching your little guild for quite some time’ the witch told her stepping closer still.
Sumaey shrunk away from her on the bed, hugging her knees to her chest.
‘Waltz always *was* a little odd’ the witch said to her. ‘He always did things differently…and I am very keen to meet this strange little guild of his.’
Sumaey’s eyes widened nervously at that.
‘Yes, I know of them’ the witch said. ‘I have seen them a few times, though only at a distance, and what a strange collection of beings they are.’ The witch smiled cruelly. ‘I know them all, the blue-skinned water elemental, the mechanical spider, the stag, the cat…’ she paused. ‘They must be wondering where you two have gotten to, I can bring them here if you like.’
‘You keep away from them’ Sumaey hissed.
‘Oh?’ the witch bowed her head to her then, smiling with amusement now. ‘So, you do have some fire in you after all.’
The witch sat on the edge of the bed, leaning back on her hand as she surveyed Sumaey.
Sumaey’s guard was raised, and she was very caution around the witch.
‘You fell from the sky didn’t you.’
Sumaey said nothing, glowering at the witch coldly.
‘You should be thanking me’ the witch smirked turning away then. ‘I saved your life.’ Her eyes flickered back towards Sumaey for a brief moment. ‘But I could kill you all too easily. I have power over you, I could fight and defeat you easily. Without even lifting a finger.’
‘You think it’s a good thing you did to save me?’ Sumaey questioned. ‘You killed Waltz’s old guild. His entire guild…because he disobeyed you. You’re a monster.’
The witch began to laugh then, a gentle chuckle.
‘That’s right’ she smiled. ‘I am. I have never been kind, not even as a child.’
The witch turned back to face Sumaey, grinning widely.
‘You have never been a child, that’s right’ she said, reading Sumaey’s uncertain expression. ‘I know what you are. You are a celestial being. You belong in the cosmos, living amongst the stars. You are a very powerful creature who can take a human-looking form, but you are not human.’ She paused then thoughtfully. ‘You hold incredible power within you, but you cannot reach it. Oh, and by the way…’ the witch added casually straightening and resting her hands on her lap, ‘you lost your memory when you fell. The reason you lost your memory, is because when you fell, you hit your head.’ She began to laugh at that. ‘It’s so simple. Maybe if you hit your head again really hard you will regain your memory. Or maybe you might kill yourself. Who knows?’
‘Where is Waltz?’ Sumaey asked stubbornly.
‘He’s not here’ the witch replied shortly.
‘Where is he?’
‘I know what he is by the way’ the witch spoke. ‘I’m wondering if you do. He is actually a hybrid. His father is a fairy, a beautiful fairy with dragonfly wings. And he has royal blood in him, he is in line to the throne. He doesn’t even belong to this world, but to the fairy kingdom, which can only be reached by magic.’
‘I want to leave’ Sumaey said barely listening to her words.

‘You can if you like’ the witch spoke rising to her feet now. ‘If I wanted to hurt you I could, all to easily. If you wanted to hide, then I will find you. You may as well stay here where it is safe. Waltz will return in time, and if you wander off, they how will he find you?’
Sumaey said nothing, but clenched her teeth silently.
‘All of you will be here soon’ the witch said turning to walk away, ‘I am keen to meet the others properly. In the meantime, stay here. There is a bathroom across the hall. You can wash the blood from you and get into your regular clothes again.’
Sumaey stared down at herself where she had been stabbed, the blood, her blood, was dried and crusted and uncomfortable, the dress she wore now was ruined.
The witch paused at the door, glancing back. ‘Such fascinating beings Waltz has found for his new guild’ she spoke, before walking through the door and heading back downstairs.
Sumaey heard her leave the house, before all fell silent.
She grasped at the bedsheets beneath her nervously.
‘Waltz…’ she whimpered. ‘Where are you…...?’

Chapter Seventeen
Into the Fire

Several weeks passed, and there was still no sign of Waltz. Nothing.
Sumaey had begun to get worried.
‘Where is he?’ she asked the witch on one day.
The witch only glared at her, before walking away without a word.
Several days after that, the witch returned to the home. She was covered in blood, almost entirely from head to toe. It was like she had been in some sort of ritual, or a slaughter.
Sumaey stood in the doorway watching as the witch gasped, straightening and walking forwards.
Sumaey watched her go silently as she headed upstairs, probably to wash.
Sumaey dipped her head, expression dampened. She was overcome with worry.
‘Come on Waltz. *What are you doing?* Come back to me already.’

Several more days passed before Sumaey spoke to the witch again.
‘I’m hungry.’
The witch groaned in irritation. She stood in the kitchen of the home with her hands pressed against the table, giving Sumaey a flat expression, her lip curled up slightly in what appeared to be disgust.
‘I’m busy’ she told Sumaey shortly. She appeared to be doing some kind of experiment. There was a glass beaker in front of her filled with a dark-purple liquid, and an open book beside that.
‘I’m bored’ Sumaey added. ‘Where is Waltz?’
‘Gods not him again’ the witch sighed. ‘I’ll bring him back if that will shut you up.’

‘You’ll bring him back?’ Sumaey questioned. ‘You mean…. you’ve been able to do that all this time?’
‘Yeah?’ the witch snapped. ‘So? And before you give me grief about it, Waltz has the means to return on his own whenever he wants but he’s choosing not to. Why do you think that is?’
‘Uh…’
‘You know what? I’m tired of this anyway. I’ll bring him back if that will stop your sulking.’
The witch clicked her fingers then, and Waltz suddenly appeared into the room out of thin air. For a moment he looked confused as he glanced about him, before his sights fell on Sumaey.
‘Oh’ he said.
‘…. Waltz….’ Sumaey breathed.
Waltz stared at her in shock for a moment, before storming out of the room away from her.
‘Waltz wait!’ Sumaey called out, hurrying after him.
‘Ugh’ the witch groaned once she was alone again. ‘What a pain.’

Once they were outside, Sumaey grabbed Waltz by the shoulder, spinning him around.
‘Waltz what happened? What’s wrong?’
‘I’m sorry’ Waltz gasped. ‘I’ve done horrible things…’
Sumaey stared at him hard, he appeared to be short of breath, almost as if he were a little in shock.
‘I….’ Waltz mumbled, finding his voice. ‘I um…. the witch has been caring for you has she?’
Sumaey’s expression saddened then.
‘Is there nothing you can do to get away from her?’
‘No’ Waltz shook his head. ‘I…. I gave myself to the witch to use as she pleased…to do her dirty-work. I did this to free the woman I loved who was a slave to her. She left me, and now I’m stuck with the witch. She will never free me, I’m too valuable to her.’ He smiled then. ‘I guess that serves me right for being such a love-struck blind fool.’
‘Don’t say that’ Sumaey told him sincerely.
Waltz raised his eyes to hers again.
‘I love you Waltz. Your whole guild loves you. Though they won’t say it.’
‘My whole guild?’ Waltz mumbled. ‘Even Spirit?’
Sumaey smiled weakly at that. ‘Even him’ she sighed.
She stepped towards Waltz then, raising her arms she embraced him. Waltz bowed his head, closing his eyes and holding her back.
‘Can we leave now?’ Sumaey asked him. ‘I want to get away from the witch.’
‘Yes’ Waltz whispered, ‘yes.’
Sumaey let go of him, stepping back.
‘I just want to ask her something’ Waltz spoke.
‘You want to ask her something?’
‘I think she can helps us.’

‘What does the serum do?’
The witch turned to Waltz with an expression unreadable.
‘You know I could send you away forcibly any time I want.’

‘Answer the question’ Waltz said shortly.
‘What do I get in return?’
Waltz sighed, standing with his arms folded, he glanced to the side towards Sumaey who stood beside him.
‘What do you want?’ Waltz asked.
The witch frowned then in thought.
‘Actually, now that I think about it, there is nothing you can give me…. that you would be willing to give me’ she corrected, ‘that I would want. I want to see the other members of your guild for my own curiosity, but I can summon them here anytime…hmmm.’
She appeared to be thinking for a moment.
‘Ok’ she said at last. ‘I will tell you about the serum that you failed to get from Walter Jules Frey, otherwise known as the pyromancer.’
‘You will?’ Waltz spoke in genuine surprise. ‘Really?’
‘Only because it’s no trouble for me to do so and I don’t think I can get anything out of it’ the witch answered turning to face him. ‘And you’ve already probably guessed it anyway. The serum you wanted to get your hands on…. will turn that fire-bird back into a woman.’
‘It will?’ Waltz breathed in awe. ‘Woah.’
‘Why does the merchant want it?’ Sumaey asked.
‘I could tell you but I won’t’ the witch replied. ‘There would be no benefit for me….and I just don’t want to.’
‘It has other effects doesn’t it?’ Waltz spoke as Sumaey gritted her teeth in annoyance at the witch’s answer. ‘The serum….it does other things besides being able to save this woman.’
The witch stared at Waltz without expression, revealing nothing.
‘How infuriating’ Waltz mumbled.
‘You might want to get back to the manor’ the witch said to them casually. ‘There is a battle going on.’
‘A battle?’ Waltz baulked. ‘You mean a fight? Like a war? At the party? I mean the hall we were at?’
The witch straightened, lifting her shoulders, her expression growing darker as she quickly tired of Waltz’s questions.
‘The building is ravaged by fire’ she breathed. ‘I will give you access to your own powers’ the witch told Waltz, ‘for a short time only’ the witch finished, ‘in exchange for me to see your guild.’
Waltz frowned at her nervously. ‘What do you want with them?’
‘I just want to…*see them*.’
‘Are you going to hurt them in any way?’ Waltz asked.
‘No. On this I swear. I just want to know what they are and to get a closer look at them. I want to see them, and to learn from them.’
‘Fine’ Waltz sighed. ‘As long as you promise not to take anything away from them or to do anything that may harm them in any way shape or form. I don’t want anything deceitful from you. I would rather you hurt me, but don’t hurt my guild.’
The witch smiled warmly at him then, as if amused.

‘How admirable’ she said to him sarcastically. ‘And you are careful with your words’ she told him. ‘Fine. I assure you that I will do nothing against your guild that you do not like. I just want to see them.’
‘Fine.’
The witch walked past Waltz then, turning then to face the both of them.
‘You must both be ready to fight as soon as we get there’ she said to them. ‘There is total carnage.’
‘So, what do you want out of all of this?’ Waltz asked suspiciously.
‘There is something I want’ the witch said. ‘This chaos…benefits me. It makes it easier for me to reach my goal. I need something within that manor. The fires will help me reach it.’
‘I see’ Waltz narrowed his eyes.
‘We will go there now’ the witch said. ‘All of us.’
She waved her hand instantly after speaking, and suddenly the other members of the guild appeared within the room, Spirit and Loxus and Graham and the cat.
They all looked surprised, even Loxus through his body language. The cat immediately arched its body, bearing its teeth.
The witch ignored all of them, casting her magic out within the entire room and transporting all of them away together.
The next time they opened their eyes, they were back at the manor. And it was on fire.
‘Oh heck’ Waltz gasped.
Spirit glanced around him, eyes wide with fear and uncertainty.
Waltz groaned in pain then, body hunched over as magic consumed him, he threw his head back, body glowing with light.
Sumaey gasped in shock as she saw Waltz transform into the giant sky serpent, head bowed. Right before her very eyes.
She stared in disbelief at the colossal figure towering over them.
Spirit and Graham sharply backed away from him, as Waltz in his serpent form began to roar.
Waltz contorted his body, rising upwards sharply through the sky. He flew.
‘I’ve never seen…’ Sumaey breathed.
‘You’ve never seen Waltz’s other form?’ the witch smiled back at Sumaey.
Sumaey stared at the witch.
‘Do you like what you see? Do you find him beautiful?’ the witch asked.
Sumaey said nothing.
‘You should see his true form, his form as a fairy. He has wings you know.’
Sumaey swallowed the lump in her throat, turning away from the witch and staring towards the sky.
‘Waltz….’
The witch whipped her head around, eyes growing wide as she stared towards the sky.
Great creatures made of fire swam through the sky over the manor. They all watched as Waltz clashed with these creatures, fighting them viciously with everything he had, his great serpent body twisting and writhing in the sky.
‘Oh Waltz’ Sumaey whimpered, heart tearing in her chest as she watched. ‘Please be safe...’
The witch summoned a spell then, casting her hands up around her. There was a sudden dampness in the air around them, and Spirit fell to his knees.

‘Spirit!’ Sumaey cried, rushing over to him.
The witch walked away from all of them, heading towards the fires, and using her spell to put them out.
It was then that Sumaey realised she was using Spirit to do this, and draining his strength.
‘Hang in there Spirit’ Sumaey whispered to him. ‘Hang in there, stay strong.’
Spirit groaned, head bowed as he clawed at the dirt, pain and weakness spreading through his body.
Sumaey raised her head, seeing soldiers coming towards them.
‘What is going on?’ she uttered, rising to confront them as the nameless cat stood by her side, Graham and Loxus flanking Spirit and sticking close to him to protect him.
‘Stay away!’ Sumaey ordered the men as they approached.
Some moved past, others raised their weapons. Sumaey raised her hands, palms wreathed in flame as she called her magic to her.
She charged forwards to fight as behind her, Spirit lay there helpless, Graham leaning into him fearfully as they were surrounded by men. Loxus rearing up in agitation and using his body as a shield as some of the soldiers began to attack. The cat also did what it could to protect and to fight, though everything it did was unseen. Sumaey as she fought was beginning to tire, quickly becoming overwhelmed.
‘I can’t’ she gasped, falling to a knee, sweat dripping from her brow and body shaking. ‘I…. ah….’
There was a sudden purple light, an orb flying away. Sumaey turned her head wearily behind her to see the cat glowing purple.
Off in the distance there was a great crash, an explosion, Sumaey was vaguely aware of seeing Waltz’s silhouette amongst the flames, his colossal serpentine body.
Sumaey forced herself to rise. Everything seemed to move in slow motion. Sumaey turned, grabbing Spirit around the body and lifting him to his feet.
With the help of the cat, and of Loxus who shielded them, they escaped the gardens, running to somewhere secluded, somewhere no one would see them, as ahead of them Graham led the way.
Sumaey hid close to the wall, holding Spirit to her as they hid in the shadows, resting now
‘Are you alright?’
Spirit grimaced, body tense.
Sumaey rose to her feet, looking towards the fires around her. They were nearly all burned out.
She saw men charging the manor.
‘What is happening?’ Sumaey uttered.
‘We should get away’ Spirit groaned. ‘We should…get to higher ground. Waltz is out there somewhere…’
‘What?’ Sumaey gasped.
‘We need to say somewhere safe. But we need to watch out for Waltz. He won’t be able to find us…. not here...’
‘You’re right.’

The group retreated from the manor, climbing the steep slopes and hiding within the cover of the trees. They watched the manor and the aftermath of the chaos they had been caught up in.
'There is so much more to this story that we do not know' Sumaey mumbled.
'That is none of our concern' Spirit groaned. 'We should only care about our goal.'
'The bird' Sumaey voiced. She grimaced then. 'I hope the witch does not find us.' She turned to face Spirit. 'How do you feel?'
'I'll be fine' he groaned. 'I…. she used my magic….my power over water…she…that parasite' he hissed.
'She still holds power over you?'
'No' Spirit shook his head. 'No now. She…. uh… she is not using my magic any more…. I'll be ok…I just need to rest.'
Graham approached the water elemental, nuzzling into him. Spirit raised his hands, caressing the stag's head gently.
'I am alright my friend' Spirit said to him. 'I am alright.'
The water elemental looked over at the spider then.
'Loxus?' Spirit voiced. 'Are you alright?'
Loxus did not speak (he could not, not in words anyway) but he raised one of his legs slowly, giving a faint wave in response. He had been so agitated before, now he had calmed. He rested his body on the ground now, falling still.
'Oh Loxus…' Sumaey sighed, touching his cold body. 'I'm sorry…'
The cat circled around them, coming to stand before Loxus and sitting.
'Do you see him anywhere?' Spirit grumbled.
Sumaey looked over at the ruins of the manor.
'No' she moaned. 'I don't see him anywhere…'

Chapter Eighteen
The Serum

It was many hours they waited. Whatever had happened in the manor had died down now, and everything was silent as the night wore on.
Sumaey continued to watch.
'You won't find him there' came a voice.
The others turned to see the witch coming towards them through the trees.
Behind her was Waltz, and he was badly injured.
'Waltz!' Sumaey cried, rushing up to him and embracing him.
'Ow' Waltz moaned feebly.
'I'm sorry' Sumaey let go of him quickly. 'Are you alright?'
'Are you all ok?' Waltz asked back.
Sumaey stared at him wide-eyed for a moment, before breaking into a smile, tears of joy rolling down her cheeks.
'You're worrying about us?'

‘Are you?’ Waltz groaned through gritted teeth.
‘Yes. We are all fine.’
‘I’m glad’ Waltz grinned, blood and gashes over his face. ‘I would hate it if things were not absolutely peachy.’
Sumaey turned to see the witch standing over Spirit, who recoiled away from her.
‘Such a fascinating creature’ the witch uttered to herself.
‘Don’t hurt him’ Waltz grimaced. ‘You said you wouldn’t.’
‘Don’t worry’ the witch replied shortly, moving away from him towards Graham, then Loxus, looking from first one then to the other, the cat had run away. ‘I am done here. I have gotten what I need. Oh, and here is the serum’ she said, pulling it from nowhere and tossing it to Waltz who caught it in his hands.
‘Nice guild’ the witch said in a level tone. ‘Quite a collection you have.’
She gleamed cruelly for no apparent reason.
‘Goodbye Waltz’ the witch said excitedly. ‘I’ll see you next time.’ And then an instant later, she was gone, in the blink of an eye.
‘Yeah’ Waltz grimaced. ‘I’ll be waiting.’
‘Waltz…’ Sumaey whispered.
‘Let’s get out of here’ Waltz said to them all. ‘This quest is finally almost over, but first I need to rest.’

A short time later, Waltz lay on a bed, resting on his back.
They had travelled a short distance from the manor to the town nearby, and rented a single room in a small inn.
They all gathered here now, and it was crowded, but it was dry and warm. Outside it was raining, and there was a chill in the air.
Sumaey tended to Waltz’s wounds now. His body was mostly naked. She washed his wounds with warm water from a bowl. The cloth Sumaey held was already stained pink.
‘Does it hurt at all?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘Of course it hurts’ Waltz groaned. ‘My body hurts all over…. but the good news is…. that I can still transform…if only for a short time. The witch gave me that power. We don’t have a lot of time’ Waltz breathed. ‘We have to be quick. We need to find the fiery bird again before…’
‘Before what?’
‘The witch had only given me access to these powers for a short time’ Waltz said. ‘I…we cannot stay here tonight, we have to move quickly. I just…needed to rest for a short time. My injuries… I feel so exhausted....’
‘I understand’ Sumaey spoke quietly.
‘Spirit’ Waltz voiced. ‘How do you feel?’
‘I feel a lot better’ Spirit replied.
Spirit who had been sitting on the floor rose to his feet, towering over the others.
‘The witch…. she is so powerful’ the water elemental said.
‘She said you were stronger than her’ Waltz said to Sumaey. ‘She said…you were a celestial being.’

‘Apparently so’ Sumaey mumbled. ‘But…I still don’t remember anything. She said that…. when I fell…. I hit my head. That’s why I lost my memory…apparently. She said…the witch said that…I may regain my memory again, if I suffer another head injury, and that is dangerous.’
Waltz let out a sigh, leaning back on the bed and turning his head towards her.
Sumaey continued to clean his body, wiping away the blood.
‘You need a few stitches’ she said under her breath.
‘Can you do it?’ Waltz asked.
‘Yes’ Sumaey replied. ‘But I would have to go and buy some things.’
‘That’s fine’ Waltz said. ‘Can you go soon?’
‘I’ll go now.’
‘As soon as…you finish caring for me’ he finished with a smile, ‘I would like to leave as soon as possible.’
‘I’ll be back’ Sumaey said turning away from him, pouring the pink water down the sink. ‘Just stay in bed and rest.’
‘Ok’ Waltz breathed. ‘Thank you Sumaey’ Waltz spoke sincerely. ‘I really appreciate you taking care of me like this.’
Sumaey smirked back at him, pausing at the doorway.
‘Whatever’ she said. ‘Just stay here.’
She closed the door after her, leaving Waltz and the others behind.
Waltz shifted on the bed slightly, tilting his head back to see the others clearly. Loxus was utterly still now, his great metallic tail curled around him, the lantern resting on the floor beside him. Graham was fast asleep, his white coat flecked with dirt and blood, and Spirit, stood on the other side of the room, leaning back against the wall with his arms folded.
‘My guild’ Waltz sighed, facing ahead again towards the ceiling as the nameless cat jumped on the bed to sit beside him. ‘This is all I ever want in life.’
‘Are you looking forward to this long quest finally being over?’ Spirit voiced.
‘Yes’ Waltz breathed. ‘Yes, I am, though I have to admit…’ his eyes shone brightly then, ‘…it’s been fun…’
‘I guess we’ll take a break after all of this is over’ Spirit said to him.
‘Sure’ Waltz nodded. ‘I would like that very much…’
He reached down beside him to touch the egg they had carried with them. It sat in a bag now beside him, and as he touched its blue shell, he felt the warmth within it.
‘I can’t wait until you hatch’ he whispered. ‘I wonder what you will look like…I can’t wait to finally meet you…’

Sumaey returned a short time later with what she needed. Waltz shifted on the bed, rolling around and positioning himself so it was easier for Sumaey to reach his wounds to stitch them up.
‘Ow. Ow. Ow.’
‘Will you shut up?’ Sumaey huffed.
‘Sorry it hurts.’
‘Stop being a little bitch and be quiet.’
Waltz let out a huff, staring at the wall opposite them.

After a few moments, he began to whine. First quietly, then louder, his noise gradually increasing.
'I'm finished' Sumaey spoke shortly after, 'thank god.'
'Ok' Waltz gasped. 'Thank god.'
He sat up then, moving slowly.
'Are you going to be ok?' Sumaey asked.
'Ah.' Waltz touched one of the wounds tentatively, there were so many scratches on his body, bruises and burns. 'I'm going to have to be' he sighed. 'We don't have a lot of time. We should go now, right now.'
'Alright.'
'We just need to stop off for some food' Waltz said putting his shirt back on and reaching down for the bag that held the egg. 'Then afterwards we have to travel as quickly as possible.'
Loxus and Graham rose to their feet upon hearing these words.
'You've got the serum?' Sumaey breathed.
Waltz took it out of the pocket of his bag, holding it out for her to see.
It was a needle, with a bright green liquid within its glass cylinder.
'This' Waltz sighed, 'will make her human again.'

Chapter Nineteen
Transformation

They travelled fast across the land, heading in a straight line directly towards the mountain where the great fiery creature nested.
They walked on foot (sometimes they ran if they were going downhill, sometimes they jogged) they travelled without rest, and were exhausted, fatigue and lack of sleep were getting to them, but they ate on the go. They did not rest.
'Ah' Waltz gasped at last as they reached the edge of the forest they had been traveling through, stepping out into the open now they could see the town before them, and sitting upon the horizon, was the mountain. 'Ahaha' Waltz began to laugh with exhaustion. 'We're here finally. *Finally*....'
'Travelling was the easy part' Sumaey huffed at him, wiping her brow. 'You can still transform into that snake, right?'
'Yes' Waltz breathed. 'But this will be the last time I can do it. The witch has given me access to this power for only a short time, and I do not have the energy to hold that form for too long. Oh god I'm so tired…'
'Don't think about that' Sumaey snapped at him angrily. 'Get your head in the game. None of us could have any idea how long and difficult this quest would be when we took it, but its nearly over. We have to see it through. By the end of today we will be rich. Think of the reward!'
Waltz straightened then, sighing.

‘You’re right, it’s just a little way to go. This is going to be easy’ he laughed, trying to convince himself that it was so.
‘What is that?’ Spirit voiced suddenly, pointing a short distance away.
Waltz whipped around in alarm, squinting at the two figures some distance away, clinging to the shadow of the trees.
‘Is that…?’ Sumaey narrowed her eyes leaning forwards, ‘…. Lyle? And Felix?’
‘Oh no way!’ Waltz cried out. ‘What are they doing here?’
‘Actually, I’m not surprised they’re here’ Spirit replied.
‘Yeah me neither’ Sumaey added flatly.
‘Well let’s go say hi’ Waltz began making his way towards them. ‘No doubt they are here for *her*.’ He smiled then as he made his way forwards, walking along the border of the woods. ‘Brother and lover’ he sighed tiredly as he forced his legs to move onwards, his muscles burned painfully.
‘Felix’ Sumaey added keeping in step with him, ‘it all begin with him.’
‘Such an amazing creature’ Waltz grinned, barely able to keep his eyes open.
‘You share a fascination with your brother over chimeras?’ Sumaey asked Waltz as they walked forwards, Lyle and Felix keeping a close eye on the guild approaching them.
‘Yes, I do’ Waltz blinked. ‘I just see them far less often than my brother does, I don’t get to study them up close like he does.’
‘Too bad.’
The two groups stopped before one another.
‘Long time no see lizard-boy’ Waltz waved at Felix, who stared back with an expressionless face.
‘I shouldn’t be surprised’ Lyle spoke evenly to Waltz.
‘Don’t give me that, I’m here to help’ Waltz replied flatly. ‘By the end of today, everything will be how it should be, and I can take the holiday I so badly need.’
Lyle and Felix stood side by side watching Waltz.
‘What are you going to do?’ Felix voiced.
‘I’m not going to hurt her’ Waltz replied. ‘You will be with your love again’ he told Felix, ‘and you with your sister’ he said to Lyle.
‘I hope she does not find me a monster’ Felix worried.
‘It’s ok’ Lyle said to him softly, ‘she has already seen you in this form, she put herself in danger for you. She will still love you.’
‘But she has been in that form for so long’ Felix spoke forlorn, hand going to his head, ‘it’s likely she has forgotten who she is…she’s probably forgotten she is even human…’
‘She is still the same person’ Lyle said to Felix. ‘Don’t think about it.’
Felix turned away then, gritting his teeth. He looked sad.
Waltz just stared at them tiredly, barely able to keep his eyes open. And then they all heard a noise, a cry from above.
‘Hm?’ Waltz tilted his head upwards. ‘Oh, look at that. There she is’ he said wearily.
Beside him Lyle and Felix’s eyes were wide with shock.
‘She’s alright’ Felix laughed with relief, eyes shimmering with tears. ‘Oh, thank god.’
‘Every time we see her we fear it may be the last’ Lyle glowered.
‘Well I guess I better get going’ Waltz sighed.

‘What are you doing?’ Lyle said with alarm as Felix began to protest.
‘Relax’ Waltz sighed yawing. ‘God I’m so tired.’ He pulled all the bags off Graham’s back, and jumped on instead. ‘I’m going to save her.’
‘How are you going to save her?’ Felix asked.
‘I have a serum’ Waltz answered.
‘What?’ Lyle raised an eyebrow.
‘Are you sure that’s not going to hurt her?’ Felix asked nervously.
‘I’m almost certain’ Waltz replied, jerking on the reins.
Graham jerked his head back, walking around and turning to face the mountain.
‘Waltz!’ Sumaey called out.
‘Wait for me’ Waltz called out, kicking Graham in the flank and sending him into a run. ‘I’m going to fix this!’
He tore forwards, the wind whipping his pink hair back from his face as he charged onwards, across the open plains and closer towards the mountain.
Graham rode as fast as he could, Waltz’s weight heavy on his back.
Waltz glanced up towards the sky again, seeing the fiery bird fly over the mountains, disappearing from sight.
‘It’s heading back to its nest!’ Waltz called. ‘Can you make it up the hill?’ Waltz asked Graham, who roared in response.
The white stag slowed as he reached the bottom of the mountain, striding up the steep slope slowly as he began his ascent.
‘It’s not far’ Waltz said patting Graham’s neck. ‘Just a little further…’

He leapt off Graham’s back when they reached the open space again where the creature nested. Graham turned and crawled away, panting heavily with exhaustion.
‘And so we meet again’ Waltz spoke clearly, standing above the open space above the nest with his hands on his hips.
The fiery bird turned towards him with a roar, its brilliant feathers burning red, eyes glowing in a really scary way.
‘Here we go’ Waltz wiping his brow. ‘Time to end this at last.’
He stepped forwards, sliding down the rocky slope and coming to level with the beast.
‘…..hello Rebecca.’
The bird screeched at him, raising its wings ready to take off.
‘I don’t think so’ Waltz mumbled, drawing his sword and tearing forwards. ‘Come to me.’
He slashed at the creature, cutting its wing. The bird screeched in rage, lunging forwards towards him.
Waltz cried out in pain then as the creature cut him, he felt the warm damp sensation of blood gushing from his chest, grimacing in determination and trying to fight back, but not hurt the creature. He was at a disadvantage, he had to save her, but she had lost her mind. She was trying to kill him. He tried to get away from her then, feeling only pain, but then the bird grabbed him, shoving him onto his back, and beginning to maul him.
Waltz began to scream, gritting his teeth in concentration as he forced himself to focus, to see through the pain.

He summoned his magic to him then, letting go of his sword. Waltz's body began to glow, and he transformed, into the great serpent of the sky.
The bird leapt off him then, taking to the sky. Waltz now in the body of the snake righted himself, rising towards the sky with all speed and catching the bird.
The bird turned in the air, wings splayed as it turned to confront Waltz.
Its claws cut Waltz deep in the sides, its fire burned his flesh, but Waltz fought back, trying to get a hold of the bird, but it was difficult. It was difficult to see through the flames, through the pain, and it was made even harder, because he did not want to hurt her. Not more than he had to, only enough to subdue her.
He managed to grab her by the wing, holding onto her tightly. The bird immediately began to attack him even more frantically, clawing at his face and his eyes.
Waltz tightened his grip on the creature's wing, tasting her blood as the creature screeched and howled in pain.
Waltz's body began to glow again, and he felt the magic beginning to leave him. He had seconds, he had to move fast.
Still holding her, he turned in the air, heading back down to earth, pulling the creature with him.
He crashed into the ground, still holding onto her wing. He let go of her only after several seconds, as he transformed back into his other form.
The bird attacked him again, tearing into his back as Waltz screamed in pain. He let out a gasp as the creature ran its claws down the flesh of his back, Waltz reached for his pocket, for the serum, rolling onto his back and stabbing the bird in the chest with the needle.
The bird immediately began to howl, a higher screech than before as it struggled to dislodge the needle, but it was too late. The serum was already in her body.
The bird's body began to contort then, and it began to howl, gasping again and again, its body hunched over.
It raised its wings, rising quickly into the sky, but as it flew, its feathers began to fall away.
Waltz pushed himself up, resting on his elbow and squinting, blinking repeatedly, trying to clear the blood from his eyes.
He saw in the sky, what happened above him.
The bird clawed at her chest, writhing in the air as her feathers continued to fall away.
Waltz gasped in shock as he saw her completely transform into a woman, with beautiful golden hair.
'….Woah…' Waltz breathed.
And then she began to fall. Waltz let out a gasp, realizing with horror that she could not hold herself in the air.
A figure shot past him then, for an instant Waltz thought that it was Felix. But no.
'…Lyle?'
Lyle jumped in the air then, soaring upwards.
He could fly. Waltz hardly seemed surprised, too tired, too fatigued. In too much pain.
He watched as Lyle caught the figure falling in the sky, holding her gently in his arms.
Felix skidded to a stop beside Waltz, staring up with wide eyes at the figures in the sky.
'Rebecca!'
Waltz turned his head wearily towards the chimera, blinking the blood from his eyes.

He looked upwards again at the figures, watching as Lyle still holding his sister, descended slowly, touching down gently to the ground.
He lay her down, kneeling beside her, taking off his cloak and wrapping it around her shoulders. Covering her body.
'What have you done to me?' the woman spoke. 'What have you done to me?'
'Rebecca?' Lyle voiced.
Felix stepped forwards tentatively, eyes wide with disbelief.
He clapped his hands to his mouth then, tears shimmering in his eyes.
'Oh my god…I can't believe it…'
He knelt before Rebecca then, reaching out to her hesitantly.
'Rebecca, do you remember me?'
Rebecca turned her eyes towards him, she still appeared to be dazed. Her arm bled where Waltz had bitten her, but there were no other injuries. She was safe.
'Your face' the woman spoke in a distant voice. 'It seems familiar to me.'
'You know me' Felix insisted, cupping her face now. 'You know who I am.'
'I don't…' the woman said, hand going to her head. 'I don't remember…'
'She's been this way for too long' Lyle said as Felix began to cry openly now in despair. 'She's forgotten. Don't worry' he added hastily to Felix. 'She will remember. It will just take time, you are already familiar to her.'
'You' the woman spoke in a distant voice to Lyle now. 'I know you.'
'Yes' Lyle said taking her hand in both his own. 'You know me…*you know me*…...'
Felix turned away from her then, facing Waltz again.
'…Waltz….' he gasped, 'you saved her….'
Waltz lay back on the ground, staring up at the sky. He was severely injured. He was bleeding out.
'You can fly Lyle' Waltz mumbled to himself weakly. 'That's pretty cool. I was wondering…how you got here so fast….my guild are probably still on their way.'
He began to cough then, tasting blood.
'……ah…...I don't feel so good....'
'Waltz' Felix said, moving over to him now. 'Oh my god.' He glanced back at Lyle and Rebecca briefly, before looking back at Waltz.
'These wounds…oh my god I can't believe you did this' he said to Waltz.
'Did what? Risked my life? Tis my job. Owie….'
'You're bleeding out' Lyle told him seriously. 'You're going to die.'
'No' Waltz sighed, staring up at the sky, feeling completely relaxed. A singer tear ran from his eye then. 'I'll be ok. I just…ah.' He turned his head then to look at Felix, the chimera knelt beside him, worry etched on his face. 'I just need a plaster.'
'You are an idiot' Felix replied. 'But thank you for what you have done. You saved her. But…at the cost of you own life.'
Waltz let out a sigh. Eyes gentle.
Felix whipped around then, seeing movement, something running closer.
'It's the cat?' he voiced.
The cat, the nameless one, ran to Waltz with all speed, darting to his side and putting her front paws on Waltz's chest.

Waltz grimaced suddenly, moaning in pain as he felt a strange sensation pass through his body. When it was over a few seconds later he let out a gasp, breathing heavily.
The cat got off his body and he began to touch himself, feeling his own body, gingerly at first.
'…It doesn't hurt…'
He sat up carefully, looking down at himself.
'A truly extraordinary beast' Lyle grinned as Rebecca beside him looked on, still a little dazed. 'I knew it was special.'
'You saved me again buddy?' Waltz said down to the cat, who only stared silently up at him.
'This is undeniable proof now' he said, lifting the cat in his arms. 'I have a guardian angel watching over me.'
The cat did not nothing, but sat there calmly, allowing Waltz to hold her.
A few moments later, Sumaey and Spirit arrived, both panting heavily.
'Here you are' Sumaey gasped. 'What happened? Who's that?' she asked, spotting the woman now. Waltz why are you covered in blood?'
'This cat saved me again' Waltz grinned at her happily, squeezing it to his chest, though the cat did not seem to mind. 'I am alive again thanks to this.'
'That's a change of heart' Sumaey sighed with exhaustion, a smile spreading across her face. 'I'm just glad you're ok.'
'Yeah' Waltz replied, speaking seriously now. 'Me too.'
He rose to his feet, still holding the cat. Spirit was staring intently at the woman, fascinated by this new being.
'So, this is Rebecca?' Sumaey spoke.
'You saved her' Felix said, rising to his feet. 'I cannot thank you enough.'
'Oh, don't worry about it' Waltz waved him away. 'This was just another job. Plus, we get a huge reward from the people for completing this task.'
Felix stared at Waltz in confusion for a moment, before breaking into a smile.
'You've made my life worth living again. You've saved the woman I love' Felix said. 'So thank you. Words are not enough to convey my gratitude…but thank you…'
'Hey' Waltz smiled. 'Don't worry about it.
Felix stepped forwards then, embracing Waltz. 'I won't forget this' he told Waltz. 'I swear.'
He turned away then, staring back towards Rebecca.
'You've given me my future back' Felix sighed.
'What will you do now?' Waltz asked. 'About the pyromancer?'
'We are going to expose him' Felix replied. 'There is much that must be done. We cannot just kill him. People need to know who he truly is and what he had done. All the suffering that has been allowed to happen because of him. The is the only way. He must pay for his sins.'
'Your work is not finished then' Sumaey sighed.
'Oh no' Felix replied. 'We have barely scratched the surface. But…my first priority' he said turning back to Rebecca who still knelt on the floor, 'is to make her better again. Heal her wounds, and help her to regain her memory. She is my first priority.'
'It's going to be a long road ahead' Waltz replied.
'As it is for you' Felix smiled. 'Your work never ends.'

Waltz stared at him for a moment, before breaking into a smile. ‘No rest for the wicked’ he laughed.
Lyle rose to his feet, helping Rebecca to stand. She was a little wobbly at first.
‘I cannot thank you enough’ Lyle spoke, ‘all of you, we owe you a great debt.’
‘Forget it’ Waltz waved dismissively.
‘Still’ Lyle continued, ‘if we ever meet again, ‘I would like to do something for you to pay you back.’
‘I’ll start thinking about what I want’ Waltz replied in a level tone. ‘In the meantime, I think I need a good long rest, and a bath, and to collect that handsome reward. Also, my body still hurts’ Waltz added looking down at himself where there were still burns and bruises.
‘I’m sorry’ Felix laughed awkwardly.
‘Don’t be’ Waltz said turning away. ‘It’s all good. Well’ he said, glancing back with a smirk. ‘See you next time.’

Chapter Twenty
Conclusion

‘Ah man...that’s still sore as heck’ Waltz complained loudly.
‘I’m sorry’ Sumaey answered, applying the burn-healing cream to his skin. ‘I’m trying to be as gentle as I can.’
‘I hate getting hurt like this’ Waltz groaned. ‘I feel like a bruised peach.’
‘Ok’ Sumaey laughed with a frown. ‘As you say.’
‘When did Spirit say he will be back?’
‘Very soon’ Sumaey replied. ‘He’s going to collect the reward now. You know how he hates strangers. You know he will be eager to return to us.’
‘Indeed.’
They were staying at another inn now, using the last of their financial reserves.
Sumaey straightened up, giving Waltz a level expression as he sat in the chair.
‘Waltz’ she spoke seriously. ‘I want to ask you something.’
‘What is it?’ Waltz replied sounding a little nervous. ‘And why do you sound so serious?’
‘You told the witch that if she did not save me you would die.’ Sumaey paused then. ‘Would you really have killed yourself?’ Sumaey asked him.
Waltz stared at Sumaey in shock for a moment, before letting out a sigh.
‘Yes’ Waltz answered shortly. ‘I…. I already lost my old guild…. before…. before I met you. The pain I felt that day…she did it because I disobeyed her.’ He gritted his teeth, brow furrowed. ‘I cannot express in words how much I hate her, its pure loathing, it eats away at me inside. I lost my guild because of her, because of me…because I disobeyed her. Those were human lives…and she killed them…over *nothing*.’
‘I’m sorry to bring it up’ Sumaey told him. ‘I just…wanted to know.’

‘It’s ok’ Waltz sighed, relaxing a little now. ‘You can ask.’ He shook his head. ‘I just…don’t want to think about her. Not if I can help it. Not unless I have to. She is pure evil. A trickster. A master of disguise, she takes many forms.’
‘You mean she doesn’t really look like that?’ Sumaey asked. ‘What I saw?’
‘No’ Waltz groaned. ‘I don’t know what she looks like. Her true form I mean, it could be anything…. if she even has one…maybe she doesn’t. Who could say? Maybe even she doesn’t know. Witches…they are incredibly powerful…incredibly old.’
Waltz hung his head.
‘What are we going to eat tonight? He asked
‘You’re hungry?’
‘I’m just taking my mind off things’ Waltz replied. ‘And yes, I am a little hungry.’
‘Well you can have whatever you want. When Spirit gets back…well the reward will be enough to sustain us for quite some time.’
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled, ‘his mind far away. Yeah it will.’
‘Are you alright?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Yeah’ Waltz mumbled. ‘I guess…I’m just…thinking.’
Sumaey tilted her head at him, regarding him, watching him closely.
She took his arm again carefully, continuing to apply the cream gently. It would sooth the burns and ease the pain.
‘It’s cold’ Waltz said.
Spirit returned a short time later. And he brought with him the reward.
‘Woah’ Waltz gasped, unable to stop himself as Spirit tipped the bag upside down, spilling the coins onto the table.
‘I told them that the creature was killed’ Spirit informed them. ‘I thought it was easier that way.’
‘Good idea’ Waltz said. ‘Best to keep things simple eh?’
(Loxus and Graham were downstairs by the way, in the stables, the cat that still had no name, was asleep on one of the beds within the room)
‘What will we do now?’ Sumaey asked Waltz, as Spirit moved away across the room, heading to the cabinet to get a drink.
‘I don’t know’ Waltz spoke in a distant voice. ‘There is nothing in particular that we need to do right now’ Waltz said. ‘I say we take a holiday. We deserve it after this quest. It’s been so difficult. A really difficult one…this quest…’ he paused then. ‘There is a beautiful location, far from here, a very long way from here.’
‘It’s ok’ Sumaey said. ‘I’m used to travelling.’
‘This place, I’ve been there before, only once before…a very long time ago, with my brother’ Waltz added happily. ‘Oh, I know we could go visit my brother.’
‘Tell me about this other place first.’
‘Oh, you are going to love it’ Waltz sighed, his eyes glowing with joy, ‘its…almost like a celestial world, everything is so still and peaceful….and the way the water reflects the world around it…. oh…’ he sighed again. ‘I so badly want you to see it.’
‘I’m sure I will in that case, I mean why rush, we’ve got all the time in the world?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz smiled at her. ‘It feels good doesn’t it?’

The next morning they left late, sleeping late, having breakfast late. Everything was done at a leisurely pace, and everything seemed somehow different, tranquil. It was the end of a chapter, a happy ending. There would be many more chapters to come, but for now, things were peaceful. But there was something to disrupt this, something to cause them all stress and unhappiness and all sorts of negative emotions. As they were gradually packing their bags, making things ready to begin their journey, Spirit alerted the others.

'Who's that?' he spoke loudly, breaking his long silence.

The others looked around then, seeing a dark-skinned woman a short distance away, one that Waltz and Sumaey instantly recognised.

'Is it her?' Waltz asked uncertainly.

'What is she doing here?' Sumaey mumbled, staring back at the woman who watched them with hawk-eyes. She was fixated on them, standing a short distance away.

It was Ebony-Snow.

'Why do I feel suddenly uneasy?' Waltz spoke, asking no one in particular.

The woman, Ebony-Snow, unfolded her arms then, striding towards them.

The cat that was by their side arched its back immediately, acting with sudden aggression and hostility towards this new figure.

Waltz's heart constricted in his chest as he saw this, glancing up again at the woman again as she approached.

The cat suddenly ran away, and standing either side of Waltz, Spirit and Sumaey tensed.

'Hello Waltz' the dark-skinned woman said stopping before him. 'How wonderful to see you again.'

'Wh-what are you doing here?' Waltz fumbled.

'I wanted to see you' the woman replied with a cruel grin. 'You are so very entertaining.'

Waltz stared at the woman in shock for a few more moments. And the colour drained out of his face.

'It's you…'

'You are a wonderful dancer' the witch teased.

'Oh god' Waltz swallowed, feeling suddenly sick. Waltz sobbed. 'Why must you torment me so?'

'I told you already' the witch answered shortly, turning her head to the side to glance at Loxus and Graham nearby. 'You are fun to me, also….' She turned back to Waltz. 'I wanted to remind you not to get carried away. I am still here, and I will call you when I am ready, when I need to. When it suits me.'

'I'm sure you will' Waltz said sullenly. 'Anything else you want from me or will you be going now?'

The witch smiled widely at him then, eyes shining brightly.

'Nothing' she said looking to Sumaey now. 'I want nothing.'

Sumaey gritted her teeth, bowing her head slightly, though she didn't say anything.

‘I hope you had fun with the pyromancer. You did a good thing saving his daughter like you did. Though of course you would not be able to do it if it were not for Lyle and his friend, the chimera Felix.’
Waltz felt sick.
‘What’s wrong?’ the witch said. ‘You look nervous.’
‘Will you leave me alone now please?’ Waltz asked her shortly. ‘Just go. Or do you want something.’
The witch chuckled to herself.
‘No’ she said turning away now. ‘I am done here. Enjoy your…*holiday*…’
She walked slowly away from them, just a few steps, before vanishing into thin air.
Waltz cursed to himself, hand going to his head.
‘Typical’ he hissed. ‘Typical of her to do that. She just *must* remind me that she is always looming over me, always looking over my shoulder…. watching me always…. she is always there. God, I just can’t get away from her no matter what I do. Only dying would free me…’
He felt a touch at his arm then, and turned to see Sumaey smiling gently at him.
‘Don’t say such things. And don’t let her get to you, that’s what she wants.’
Waltz stared at her wide eyed for a moment, before turning away, letting out a sigh, body relaxing. ‘I know you’re right’ he said to her, ‘of course you’re right but…some days I just feel so full of despair.’
‘You’ve got me’ Sumaey said drawing her hand back.
‘Not just you’ Waltz said turning to her and grinning widely now. ‘I have ALL of you. My own guild.’
Sumaey tilted her head at him, grinning back.
‘That’s the spirit’ Sumaey smiled at him. ‘Now let’s get out of here, we’ve been hanging around this part of the map for way too long.’ She brushed her chestnut hair back then, ‘I want to see this amazing place you tell me looks like so celestial, it better be as beautiful as you say it is.’
‘Oh, trust me’ Waltz smirked back at her. ‘You won’t be disappointed.’
Waltz glanced about him then feverishly.
‘What have you lost?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Nothing’ Waltz replied innocently.
‘You’re not looking for the cat are you?’
‘No?’
‘You are’ Sumaey sighed, hands on her hips and raising an eyebrow. ‘You know it can find us wherever we go. As long as Loxus stays with us.’ She glanced towards the spider-scorpion that was behind them, waiting. ‘Interesting. I wonder why these two share a link….’
‘I was just thinking’ Waltz said casually. ‘What if…you know I get stabbed…or um….a meteorite lands on me?’
‘If a meteorite lands on you then it lands on all of us’ Sumaey said wearily. ‘And anyway, I’m sure you would hear it coming long before it squashed you. And anyway….’ She added with a teasing smirk, ‘it’s probably not a good idea to depend on it too much. You survived without it for most of your life.’

‘Yeah but now I know I have it I can’t be happy being apart from it’ Waltz mumbled under his breath, kicking at the dirt. ‘It saved my life…...twice now…or was it three times….? I forget.’
‘In any case’ Sumaey spoke firmly. ‘Let’s go already.’
She took Graham’s reins and began to walk, Spirit walked after her, and Loxus followed after him.
Waltz lingered for just a moment longer, glancing around him for no reason in particular, before turning and walking after the others.
Please come back to me, you freaky nameless cat he thought to himself in his head. *I really need you.*
As they were walking down the road that led out of the town, Sumaey slowed to a stop, seeing three figures before her she recognised.
‘Another nasty surprise?’ Waltz asked coming up behind her. ‘Oh no’ he said, surprised that this was not in fact, a nasty surprised. ‘This is not a nasty surprise’ he said, recognising the figures of Lyle, Felix and Rebecca. ‘In fact, this is rather a pleasant surprise. How are you all doing?’
Lyle smirked at Waltz, amused by him. Beside him Lyle and Rebecca stood close, Waltz noticed they were both smiling, and holding each other’s hand.
‘I wanted to catch you before you left’ Lyle said to them. ‘Who knows where in the world you are going from here?’
‘Who could say?’ Waltz teased. ‘We don’t know ourselves, not really. Who knows were our journey will take us next?’
Lyle smiled again then, a wide and genuine smile.
‘I’m glad we got to see you before you left. I just…we just wanted to say thank you again, for everything you’ve done.’
‘Think nothing of it. I did it for the reward’ Waltz answered with a wave.
‘Of course you did’ Lyle said flatly, turning away with a frown of amusement.
‘I wanted to thank you’ Felix spoke up, grasping Rebecca’s hand tightly in his own. The couple looked so happy. ‘Rebecca is alive because of you. She is herself again.’
He glanced towards her then, and she smiled back at him, before looking back towards the guild.
‘Thank you’ Rebecca bowed low to them, ‘thank you for giving me a second chance.’
Sumaey smiled back at her.
‘Maybe we will meet again’ Waltz said to them, ‘I hope so.’
‘I hope so too’ Lyle replied warmly.
Waltz turned away then with a wave, heading out of the town.
‘Goodbye’ Waltz said, ‘until next time...’
Together, the guild began their journey.
‘That was sweet’ Sumaey said to Waltz. ‘Don’t you think?’
‘Yeah’ Waltz said, clutching at his chest. ‘I feel all warm and fuzzy inside.’
‘No seriously’ Sumaey frowned.
‘I mean it. It’s nice to see a happy ending’ Waltz replied as they continued to walk along the dirt road. ‘That is why I do this after all. To see those happy faces.’
‘I thought you did it for the money?’

‘That too’ Waltz winked at Sumaey.
‘You don’t wish to return home?’ Sumaey asked him. ‘To the fairy realm?’
‘No way’ Waltz laughed. ‘I like what I do now. So, what about you?’
‘Me?’
‘Do you miss the skies? You are a celestial being after all.’
‘No way’ Sumaey smirked to him. ‘I like what I do.’
Waltz began to laugh at her.
‘Is that so?’ Waltz turned away, walking with his hands in his pockets.
‘You know one day’ Sumaey said to him, ‘I would love to see your wings, your fairy wings, your dragonfly wings.’
‘One day you will see them’ Waltz sniggered. ‘I don’t want to show off but…. mine are really beautiful.’
‘Oh no, now I can’t wait to see.’
‘Well you’ll have to wait. I want to keep you in suspense, don’t want to spoil the surprise too quickly, I want to savour it.’
‘Okaaay’ Sumaey turned away then rolling her eyes. ‘Whatever you say. How is your egg?’
Waltz reached out for it, it was being carried in the saddlebag on Graham’s back.
‘It’s doing well’ Waltz said taking it out and holding it to him gently. ‘It’s warm. I just can’t wait until it hatches…. I’m so very excited….’
‘Just think’ Sumaey spoke in a teasing voice. ‘It could be a dragon.’
‘Just like the one I used to have’ Waltz said in a distant voice, speaking almost as if to himself. ‘…..Zero…’
‘What?’ Sumaey asked.
‘Nothing’ Waltz said hastily.
‘It could be nothing at all’ Spirit added, referring to the egg. ‘How do you know it’s going to hatch into what you want it to be? It could be a fish.’
‘It could’ Waltz said staring at the egg’s pale blue shell as he held it before his face. ‘It could be a fish. But it could also be something else. And that is part of the excitement…I have no idea what is going to come out of here.’
He grasped it in his hands lightly.
‘It’s warm’ he uttered.
‘Oh look here comes our friend’ Sumaey said.
Waltz’s expression brightened suddenly as he saw the cat running towards them, and he began to laugh with joy.
‘You did come back after all, I don’t know why I was beginning to worry. We could not get rid of you even if we wanted.’
The cat leapt up onto Loxus’ body then, sitting down in the centre of its back, Loxus, whether or not he noticed, did not react, but continued to walk along.
‘Come on then’ Waltz said at that moment. ‘We are all here now. Together as it should be.’
He cast his arms out wide.
‘The world is ahead!’

END OF BOOK TWO

Additional

‘So what are we doing here?’ Sumaey asked Waltz.
‘There is something I have to do’ Waltz spoke reluctantly, ‘there is something…. I have to do.’
Sumaey looked away again, towards the little village before them, they stood now in a wheat field.
‘What is this place?’
‘You’ve not been here before’ Waltz replied. ‘I have though, and it wasn’t pleasant.’
‘The witch brought you here didn’t she?’ Sumaey asked him.
‘I’ve done horrible things…evil things because of her.’ He swallowed the lump in his throat. ‘Sometimes I think that it would be better if I were to die.’
‘Don’t say that.’
Waltz glanced behind him, seeing the rest of his guild some distance away at the edge of the field, standing in the line of the trees.
‘I can’t fix the wrong I have done’ Waltz said, ‘but I would like to try.’
He brought out the bag of coins they had earned as a reward for their completing the quest, the one with the fire bird.
‘What are you going to with that?’ Sumaey asked.
‘I’m going to give it away’ Waltz replied.
‘Give it away?’
‘I’ve killed people’ Waltz spoke in a distant voice. ‘Children…families. I…. I know it’s not close to good enough but…I want to do *something*.’
Waltz found the man, who turned on to him with hate.
‘How could you show your face here again?’ the man asked him through his tears. ‘Haven’t you done enough damage? You’ve ruined my life!’
‘I was acting under orders’ Waltz spoke levelly. ‘There was nothing I could do. I had to obey.’
‘You made the wrong person angry’ Sumaey spoke up from behind Waltz. ‘That is all.’
The man, father to murdered children, and a husband to a murdered wife, turned his eyes onto Sumaey then, staring at her for a moment, before looking back at Waltz.
‘I can’t undo the damage I have done’ Waltz said to him, ‘but I want to give you this.’
Waltz parted with almost all the money they had earned that day, keeping only a little back for themselves, enough to care for his guild and feed them, if not for a few days.
The days were getting cold, and winter was on its way. He wanted to make sure his guild, his family, were well cared for.
‘Hey’ Spirit spoke up as they walked away from the little village, ‘you should not dwell on what you cannot change.’
Waltz glanced back at the water elemental with surprise then, not expecting words of comfort to come from him.
‘Right’ Waltz laughed awkwardly. ‘Yeah, you’re right, of course you’re right.’

He reached out to Spirit and Sumaey either side of him, pulling them both in for a hug.
This time Spirit didn't flinch.
'If I were able I would hug you guys with my legs I would' he said to Graham, Loxus and the cat who turned to stop before him. 'But I can't.'
Waltz began to laugh then, he was happy.
'It's time for our next adventure!' Waltz cried, all emotional now as tears ran down his cheeks. 'Wrap up warm everybody, coz it's gonna be a cold one!'

Wordcount here.....trying to make just ten more words to round it up to over 68thousand words = mission a success :)